



HIGH SCHOOL FLEXIBILITY ENHANCEMENT PILOT PROJECT

# High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project

## 2009/2010 School Year Year-End Report (Transition Year – prior to the three-year pilot)

**Submitted by**

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# High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project

## 2009/2010 School Year

### Year-End Report

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## High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project 2009/2010 School Year Year-End Report

### Executive Summary

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project is included under the umbrella of the *High School Completion Strategic Framework*. An overarching goal of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project is to increase high school completion in participating schools through innovative strategies facilitated by increased flexibility. Through the project, high schools throughout the province will gain valuable insights into potential organizational and delivery alternatives that could make a positive impact on high school completion in the future.

The 2009/2010 school year served as the transitional year of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project. Over this period, participating schools engaged in in-depth dialogue with students, parents and teachers to determine a direction for high school redesign to meet the needs of their school community. In addition to the ongoing collaboration with stakeholders, participating schools implemented a number of initiatives at their schools and observed the impact of these initiatives on the engagement of students. These observations, coupled with the input received over the year from the various stakeholders, led each school to develop a plan for redesign that would be implemented over the pilot project phase from September 2011 to June 2013 (see Appendix A: Participating Schools and Jurisdictions).

The Transitional Phase of the project has coincided with three significant initiatives in the education sector:

1. *Inspiring Action on Education*
2. *Setting the Direction*
3. *Speak Out*

These initiatives provided the 16 participating schools with additional information, stimulus and motivation to seriously consider transformation within their school communities.

Key accomplishments over the 2009/2010 school year:

- The finalization of the Evaluation Plan for the project that includes a suite of measures collected both at the school level and by the department.
- The procurement of the *Tell Them From Me* student engagement survey tool, which will be used to measure student engagement.
- The completion of action research projects at participating schools to engage students, teachers and parents in changed practice.
- The consultation and collaboration that took place among key stakeholders in participating schools.
- The awarding of a conditional grant to the Central Alberta Regional Consortium to support the collaboration among participating schools.



- The development of Final Project Plans by each participating school, submitted to the department in June 2010.

A collaborative professional network has been established through the facilitation of collaborative meetings of principals and school leaders, as well individual and group meetings of superintendents and principals. In addition to formal meetings, participating schools have extended their networking through the visitations between schools in the project. The end result of these collaborative ventures is the development of plans for the Pilot Project Phase that are supported by the group yet tailored to the specific needs of each local school community.

While the purpose of the project is to explore alternative programming and delivery alternatives outside of the 25 hour requirement, the approach by the department is not to promote any particular model to be brought into each school. The expectation is that each school will engage in redesign efforts that meet its local needs. A literature review outlining significant redesign efforts throughout North America was assembled and shared with all principals for them to consider while engaging their communities. The literature review was built around seven fundamental principles of high school redesign: mastery learning, rigorous and relevant curriculum, personalization, flexible learning environments, educator roles and responsibilities, meaningful relationships and home and community involvement. As each school has reflected on and responded to these foundational principles, a number of common strategies have emerged among schools. These common strategies include:

- *Alternative Bell Schedule*: Schools that are planning for scheduled time that is a significant departure from the traditional 4-block schedule (4 blocks of time scheduled in each semester).
- *Condensed Classes/Compacting Curriculum*: Providing less than 25 hours per credit for classes. Such a practice requires a review of the traditional delivery of courses in order to “compact” the program outcomes into less time.
- *Expanded Classes*: Providing more than 25 hours per credit for classes.
- *Credit Recovery*: Making allowances for students who have not successfully completed a course to continue their coursework beyond the time scheduled.
- *Time for Teacher Collaboration*: Providing time during the regularly scheduled day for teachers to meet.
- *Flex Blocks*: Dedicating a portion of scheduled time for students to direct their learning. During these times, all teachers are available and students are free to choose with whom and where to work.
- *Project-Based Learning*: Students meet program outcomes by engaging in inquiry-focused projects with a real-life application. Often these projects are multi-disciplined studies.
- *Use of Technology*: Plans that incorporate intentional uses of technology to support student learning or develop digital collaborative spaces.
- *Interdisciplinary Courses/Projects*: Courses or projects that are designed to meet outcomes from more than one discipline.
- *Partnerships with the Community*: Planned partnerships for students to learn collaboratively with the community outside of the school.
- *Classes “outside” of the Timetable*: Courses offered outside of the time regularly scheduled for students.
- *Micro-Scheduling by Teachers*: Allowing a group of teachers to completely manage the time available for several areas of instruction rather than time being determined by the school schedule.



- *Self-Directed Learning Modules*: Portions of or entire courses that are made available to students to work through at their own pace.
- *Flexible Career and Technology Studies (CTS)*: Allowing students to design CTS courses based on their interest in specific modules and providing the opportunity for students to progress through modules at their own pace.
- *Team Teaching*: Scheduling a group of teachers to provide instruction to a group of students.
- *Teacher Advisory*: Providing time in the timetable for teachers to work with a specific group of students to provide guidance and advice.
- *Small School Academies*: Organizing the school into sub-units with a specific group of students working with a specific set of teachers.

Although many of the above strategies are being implemented in several of the participating schools, no two schools are approaching the strategies in exactly the same way. In each school, there are nuances to the implementation of these strategies that responds to the needs of the local school community.

Notes: See Appendix G: Summary of Final Project Plans for descriptions of the strategies employed at participating schools. In addition, Appendix D: The Transitional Year at Participating Schools gives a brief description of the activity over the transitional year at each participating school.

The following seven themes have emerged during this transitional year:

- The critical role of principal leadership in engaging students, parents, teachers and the broader community in transformation of the school;
- The positive impact of the collaborative work between schools;
- The importance of the department's support to enable creativity and innovation of participating school planning;
- The need to consider increased flexibility for diploma examinations;
- The emergence of a perspective that the current organization of the *Programs of Study* can be amended to more fully engage students in their learning;
- The need to consider alternative accountability models that will support school-level, school authority and department decisions to be focused on student learning; and
- The need to consider alternative funding models.

A review of these themes has led to the following next steps as the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot project moves into the three-year Pilot Project Phase:

- Encourage sustained collaboration among participating principals with a view to maintaining a supportive professional network.
- Support the use of the *Tell Them From Me* survey as a tool to measure student engagement and to inform strategies for students to take an active role as "learning partners" and co-designers of their learning environment through professional development.
- Provide financial support to schools to facilitate ongoing collaborative meetings and visitations between participating schools.



- Link the work of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project with the work of other projects and initiatives within the department to support the transformation of the education system in Alberta.
- Extend the communication of the progress at participating schools to external stakeholders to encourage a broader understanding about the project and the practical aspects of transforming high school organization and delivery.
- Consult with the project's internal advisory team, external advisory committee, participating principals, superintendents and other education stakeholder groups to develop alternative accountability and funding models that would support the sustainability of this project.

## **Project Overview**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the four-year High School Flexibility Enhancement Project is to determine if the requirement of students to have access to 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per course credit should be maintained. Participating high schools have the opportunity to organize their schools, leading to the potential for significant redesign and innovation.

### **Goals**

The goals of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project are:

1. To explore the implications of high school organization and programming free of the 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per credit requirement.
2. To positively impact student achievement and engagement and student, parent and teacher satisfaction in participating schools through the exploration of alternative organizational and delivery structures.
3. To recommend the elimination or maintenance of the requirement for 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per credit.
4. To develop an accountability model that will include school organization, instructional delivery of the *Programs of Study* and achievement of learner outcomes (if applicable).

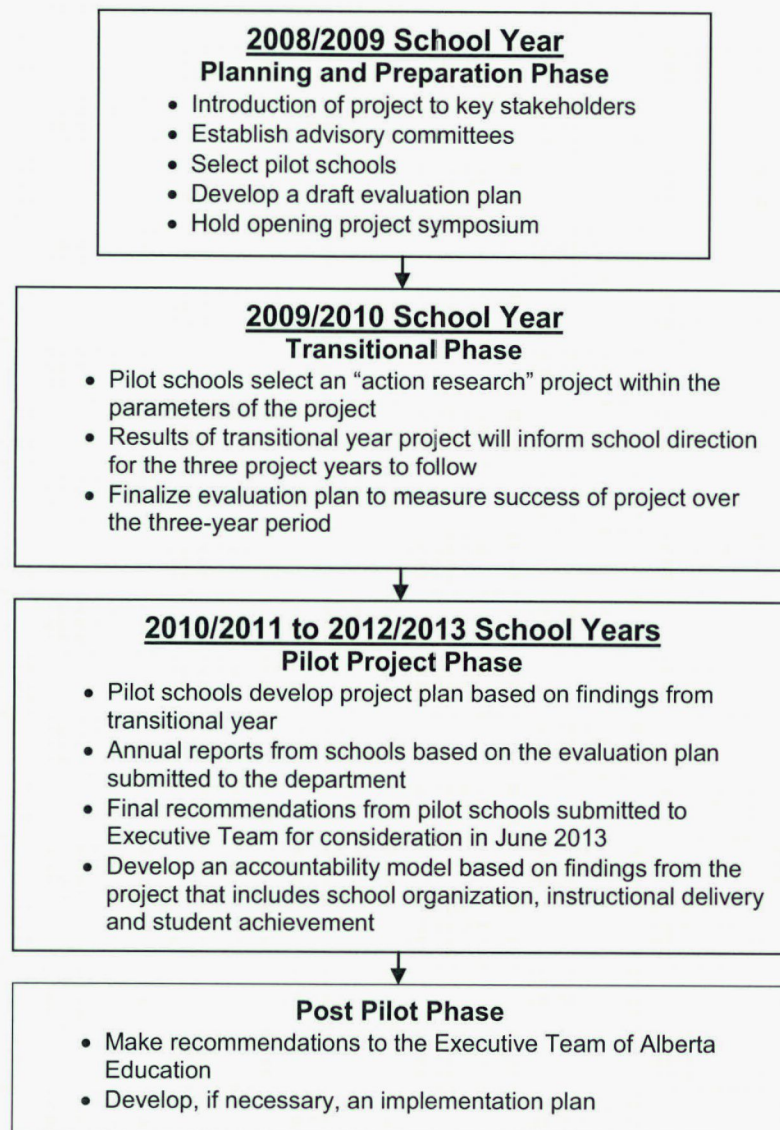
Two critical elements that must be maintained within this project are:

- Changes made to program organization and delivery must be done to enhance student engagement and achievement; and
- Schools must plan a comprehensive approach to engage their stakeholders (students, teachers, parents and the community at large).



## Project Phases

The chart below provides an overview of the stages for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project:



The 2009/2010 school year served as the transitional year of the project. Over this period, participating schools engaged in in-depth dialogue with students, parents and teachers to determine a direction for high school redesign to meet the needs of their school community. In addition to the ongoing collaboration with stakeholders participating schools implemented a number of initiatives at their schools and observed the impact of these initiatives on the engagement of students. These observations, coupled with the input received over the year from the various stakeholders, led each school to develop a plan for redesign that would be implemented over the pilot project phase from September 2011 to June 2013. This year-end report provides information about the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project over the 2009/2010 transitional year.



### Links to Other Alberta Education Initiatives

The 25-hour face-to-face requirement (the Carnegie Unit) has had a major influence on prevailing program organization and delivery in high schools throughout the province. Removing this requirement for participating schools has a far-reaching effect over a wide variety of components of high school programming. As a result, work done in this project may be of interest to other branches within the department.

There are three initiatives that are noteworthy in their linkage to the work of the schools in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project. The *Speak Out* initiative has been an excellent source of data to guide the decisions of participating schools. In fact, several of the participating schools have hosted a *Speak Out* forum at their school as a means to gather the student voice and engage students in the direction of redesign efforts. Themes expressed in the *Inspiring Action on Education* and *Setting the Direction* initiatives are consistent with the foundational principles of the literature review of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project: mastery learning, rigorous and relevant curriculum, personalization, flexible learning environments, educator roles and responsibilities, meaningful relationships and home and community involvement. As participating schools have explored opportunities for redesign, there has been much agreement with the ideas from the project and the policy directions outlined in the *Inspiring Action on Education* and *Setting the Direction* initiatives.

Notable are the following:

- Program redesign in project schools has focused on enhancing engagement of all students in the schools by raising expectations for success of every student coupled with flexible alternatives to support students. Schools are utilizing collaborative teams taking responsibility for the success of each student. Dialogue among participating schools is well aligned with the vision of “one inclusive education system where each student is successful” as expressed in *Setting the Direction*.
- The expression of personalized learning as “the provision of high-quality and engaging learning opportunities that meet students’ diverse learning needs, through flexible timing and pacing, in a range of learning environments with learning supports and services tailored to meet their needs” (*Inspiring Action on Education* p.14) lies at the core of the strategies implemented in participating schools of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project.
- The implementation of the *Tell Them From Me* student engagement survey tool is a strategy to put the student voice at the center of the decision-making. As participating schools explore the use of time, decisions made and strategies implemented begin with the needs of students in mind, ensuring that the focus is “less on the system and the school and more on the student and their education” (*Inspiring Action on Education* p.15).



- The removal of the Carnegie Unit has led participating schools to an exploration of the use of time. However, as schools explore alternative uses of time there has been a strong tendency for schools to view the current traditional organization of curriculum as a potential obstacle in supporting individual students. Participating schools have identified the clear lines drawn between subject disciplines as potential barriers to presenting outcomes in a meaningful and relevant way to students. As a result, strategies are being developed that deconstruct program outcomes, determine key or essential outcomes and then reassemble these key outcomes into meaningful learning experiences for students that often cut across traditional curricular lines. The project is an example of adapting the *Programs of Study* in ways that are most meaningful at a local level for individual students.
- A strong theme of teaching and learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is developing. As schools look to redesign their program organization and delivery, the role of technology to support students to “personalize their learning experiences, explore their own directions and use tools that match their learning styles” (*Inspiring Action on Education* p.23) has become a central concern.

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project is serving as a “learning lab” for transformation of our education system. As the project evolves, there will be many opportunities to support the transformation of education in the province of Alberta.

### **Project Management**

By June 2009, each of the 16 schools participating in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project submitted proposals for how they planned to use the upcoming transitional year to prepare for their redesign efforts. These plans outlined intended consultation sessions with major stakeholders, as well as proposed strategies to be implemented over the 2009/2010 school year. Proposals from the schools demonstrated a range of readiness to initiate change. For the most part, proposals outlined plans for collaboration along with some changes made to targeted programs with a view to observing these changes to inform a broader redesign effort in future years. However, there were also principals who made a decision to engage in a fundamental redesign of their timetables and bell schedules in the 2009/2010 school year, as there was a readiness on the part of stakeholders to adopt significant transformation of the learning environment.

The project manager made visits to each of the schools or school jurisdictions at least twice throughout the 2009/2010 school year. These visits were designed to support principals in the completion of specific tasks associated with the project but, more importantly, provided an opportunity for principals to share their plans and report on progress in their schools. A second objective that was met through these visits was to engage in a conversation with the superintendent (or designate) of each of the jurisdictions involved in the project to ensure that senior leadership was aware of the broader goals of the project and the direction the project was taking in each of their schools.



A series of meetings was set to support the collaboration between participating schools. Two full-day meetings were held for all principals and other leaders from the schools. The first meeting was held in Leduc on November 23, 2009, and the second meeting was held in Olds on April 26, 2010. Over 60 people attended each meeting, which provided opportunities for principals and school leaders to share ideas, discuss solutions to common issues and challenges and learn about the approaches in redesign being planned in other schools. As well, on March 2, 2010, all principals and superintendents or delegates attended a meeting in Leduc. This meeting of principals and senior leaders provided an opportunity for discussion around the fourth goal of the project: to develop an accountability model given the potential removal of the 25 hour requirement. This meeting was attended by both team leads for the project (see Appendix B: Governance Structure), as well as the Executive Director, FNMI and Field Services Sector, Alberta Education. Evaluations of collaborative meetings over the 2009/2010 school year were very positive, with agreement or strong agreement on all measures of the evaluations. In fact, principals insisted that the collaborative meetings between schools continue throughout the life of the project (see Appendix C: Summary of Evaluations of Collaborative Meetings).

The project manager has also been invited to meet with planning teams at several of the schools, make presentations at professional development days and participate in a parent information meeting. These meetings have helped principals share common messages to key stakeholders within their school communities.

At the culmination of the 2009/2010 school year, all participating schools submitted a Final Project Plan which outlined the planned redesign efforts in each of the schools over the three-year Pilot Project Phase of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project (see Appendix G: Summary of Final Project Plans). Although each school has expressed specific initiatives to be implemented over the three years of the project, there is an understanding that projects will continue to evolve in each school as communities learn more from the initiatives as they unfold.

### **Progress at Participating Schools**

Over the 2009/2010 transitional year of the project, principals focused their efforts on exploring program and organization redesign with their school communities. The intent of the transitional year was to provide time for participating schools to engage key stakeholders and begin a collaborative process to guide the direction that the project would take in their local school communities. There were a number of the schools who entered the transitional year having already engaged their community in explorations of programming at their school to better serve students. For these schools, the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project was seen as a perfect opportunity to implement some of the ideas that were already being shared. As a result, for some of the schools, the transitional year was a year to begin the conversation about transformation while, for others, it marked the beginning of a transformation of their learning environments.



A brief report on the activity at each school over the transitional year of the project is contained in Appendix: D: The Transitional Year at Participating Schools. These snapshots describe the progress at each school at this point in time. All participating schools plan to continue to engage their students and communities in collaborative dialogue so that redesign continues to evolve in a way that responds to learning needs.

### **Evaluation Plan**

A major task accomplished over the 2009/2010 transitional school year was the development of the final evaluation plan for the project. The Internal Advisory Team, the External Advisory Committee and all principals agreed on the set of measures that will be tracked over the three-year pilot project phase. These measures include accountability measures, other measures from the Alberta Education's data warehouse and measures collected locally. In addition to these measures, participating schools will be using a student engagement survey (the *Tell Them From Me* survey developed by The Learning Bar) to track student engagement in each school over the life of the project.

The evaluation plan includes the following suite of measures:

- High School Completion Rates (Accountability Pillar)
- Drop Out Rates (Accountability Pillar)
- Diploma Exam Participation Rates (Accountability Pillar)
- Average Diploma Examination Marks (Accountability Pillar)
- Course Completion Rates (Data Warehouse)
- Student Migration (Data Warehouse)
- Staff Migration (Collected Locally)
- Intellectual Engagement (*Tell Them From Me* survey)
- Other local measures as determined by each school

Each school will report on the suite of measures and will provide a year-end report to the project manager that will include strategies arising from an analysis of their results, as well as anecdotal information about the process of change in each school. Baseline results were collected and reported by October 15, 2010 as part of the year-end report completed on the same date by each school (see Appendix E: Report of Baseline Measures).



### **Collaboration Among Participating Schools**

Beyond the scheduled meetings of participants in the project, collaboration among the participating schools has been active. Half of the participating schools have participated in visits of other participating schools to investigate in greater detail strategies being implemented. The April 26, 2010 meeting of principals and school leaders was held at Olds High School and incorporated a school visit with opportunity to discuss the work being done by teachers and students at that school. Future collaborative meetings will be located at other participating schools to support further opportunities for collaboration and sharing.

Principals have noted that the collaborative, conversational format of scheduled meetings has led to a meaningful sharing of ideas and the ability to problem solve over common issues and concerns. A request was made by principals to secure funds to further support collaboration through ongoing meetings and school visits. In response to this request, a Conditional Grant was awarded to the Central Alberta Regional Consortium to facilitate collaborative meetings and manage funds to support ongoing visitations between participating schools.

### **Advisory Committees**

The purpose of the Internal Advisory Team and the External Advisory Committee (see Appendix B: Governance Structure) is to provide advice and support and to share information about the progress of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project. A total of eight meetings were held over the 2009/2010 school year. A summary of meetings held over the 2009/2010 school year is contained in Appendix F: Summary of Advisory Committee Meetings. Key outcomes of advisory committee meetings over the transitional year have been:

- Review of plans for the transitional year at each participating school.
- Receipt of updates on initiatives and strategies implemented at participating schools.
- Provision of input for the final evaluation plan and acceptance of the plan.
- Review of tools to measure student engagement and provision of input as to which tool to adopt for the project.
- Provision of input in the establishment of a conditional grant to support collaboration among participating schools in the project.
- Review of the final project plans for each school submitted at the conclusion of the transitional year.



## **Project Communications**

There is a great deal of interest in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project among education stakeholders, both internal and external to the department. The project manager has responded to over 30 e-mail requests for information about the project, as well as numerous telephone conversations with interested parties. Those interested have included individual principals and superintendents outside of the project, post-secondary institutions inside and outside the province and representatives of other provincial ministries who are interested in understanding the project and the initiatives that participating schools are implementing. In addition to these communications, the following presentations have been made to groups interested in learning more about the project as it evolves:

- November 17, 2009 – Presentation to the principals of Clearview School Division
- Jan 6, 2010 – Presentation to the CTS Working Group
- March 8/9, 2010 – Presentations at the CASS Curriculum Symposium
- May 31, 2010 – Presentation and hosting of school visits with representatives of Lakeland Roman Catholic Separate School District

In addition to these external communications, the project has been highlighted in communications internal to the department such as the *In the Loop* Deputy Minister's newsletter, Deputy Minister's e-mails and Assistant Deputy Minister's e-mails to ensure that the department is well informed of the progress of the department.

## **Emerging Themes and Next Steps**

The High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project gives education stakeholders, both internal and external to Alberta Education, a unique perspective on the process of transformation in Alberta high schools. The increased flexibility provided by the project has encouraged principals and their school communities to "start from scratch" in planning for transformational change. This process of removing the traditional time requirements for learning has been liberating for the participating school communities but has also highlighted other existing obstacles that school communities would need to address in order to enhance student engagement to its optimal point.

Seven major themes have been identified during the transitional year of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project.

### **The critical role of principal leadership**

The principal of each participating school occupies a key position in affecting transformational change in the school. As the project has evolved, it has become clear that the principal must work diligently to create and sustain shared leadership and deep dialogue among key stakeholders in the school community. Of particular importance is the meaningful engagement of students in the process of transformation. As the principal gains input from community members, it is critical that students see their role as much more than giving input but moving instead to a space where they are true partners in and co-designers of their learning. Establishing this partnership is proving to be a difficult task, as it defines new relationships



between students and the adults in the school. The principal must continually express a vision of the student-teacher partnership as it evolves and do the hard work of reminding all stakeholders of past assumptions that challenge this partnership. For example, when students struggle with their academic progress, the principal must challenge the adults to seek alternatives that will support the success of all students rather than uphold expectations that students simply comply with the expectations that the community has for their time in school. At the same time, the principal must model high expectations of student learning behaviour and demonstrate faith in the students' desire to succeed.

#### The positive impact of collaboration among schools

Collaboration among members of participating schools has had a very positive effect in supporting individual schools. A review of the final project plans that were submitted at the conclusion of the transitional year shows a significant influence schools have had on each other. Appendix G: Summary of Final Project Plans clearly shows that schools share many common strategies. A review of the plans for the transitional year submitted in the spring of 2009 did not show the same degree of commonality in strategies. The commonality in strategies chosen appears to be due, in large part, to the collaboration that has taken place among the schools over the transitional year. It must be noted that, although the basic strategies may be shared among schools, they are unique to each school, as they respect the dialogue with students and other stakeholders. What is evident by the variation in implementation of strategies is that schools are not entering into collaborative relationships with a view to replicating best practice but rather to learn from each other's experiences and see the potential in matching strategies with the specific needs of their communities. The end result has been a rich variety of approaches that will strengthen the learning among participating schools, as well as the potential learning for schools not currently participating in the project.

#### The importance of an enabling environment

A review of the strategies utilized by the pilot schools (see p.11 of this report) shows that not all strategies implemented require the removal of the 25 hour requirement. However, in most cases these are strategies that have not been implemented until the schools began their participation in the project. This leads to an important observation for the work of the department. The High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project has cast the department in the role of enabler. That is, the department did not come to schools with a set of models that schools were asked to implement. Instead, the department created an opportunity for schools to create their individual model by removing the requirement of time in their program planning over the next three years. This opportunity has created an enabling environment where principals can work with their stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogue about the possibilities to transform their schools to better support student success. The end result has been an open exchange of ideas among stakeholders in these communities that has led to a wide variety of ideas that may not have risen in a less enabling environment. It must be noted that the department did not simply remove a requirement; the department has also been consistent in communicating to participating schools that changes must focus on increasing student outcomes and engaging all members of the school community in the decision-making process about change.



The need to increase flexibility of diploma examinations

Although the removal of the 25 hour requirement has created a positive space for exploration among participating schools, early work in the project has revealed other perceived obstacles to fully engaging students in their learning. One such potential obstacle is the placement of diploma examinations. As schools attempt to respect the various paces of learning through more flexible timetabling, students are required to write a final examination in either January or June. In an attempt to provide further options, schools in the project have been given access to the limited examinations available in November and April. Although this has provided some additional flexibility to schools, further flexibility in the timing of diploma examinations would be welcomed by the schools.

Reorganization of the *Programs of Study*

Participating schools have also devised strategies to make student coursework more meaningful. Some participating schools are exploring project-based learning while others are exploring interdisciplinary coursework. One participating school has undergone a process of deconstructing program outcomes from English, Social Studies, Mathematics and Science and reconstructing the outcomes into units of study combined with (CTS) modules to arrive at coursework that is more relevant and meaningful to students. The dialogue among schools regarding the meaningful management of course outcomes has naturally led to a deeper questioning of the current programs of study. The current division of program outcomes into discrete disciplines is perceived as a potential obstacle to fully engaging students meaningfully in their coursework.

The need to consider alternative accountability models

The linking of time to credit (the Carnegie Unit) forms the foundation of our current accountability model. For example, the Carnegie Unit has led to the delineation of learning into discrete academic disciplines (mathematics, sciences, language learning, etc.), which we measure separately for indications of student progress. Furthermore, we use the 25 hour requirement to hold schools accountable for the time dedicated to each of these disciplines. As is evident in the early stages of this project, both the delineation of the academic disciplines and the time afforded to the teaching of them are being deeply questioned by participating schools. This leads to a need to develop alternative approaches to accountability for students, teachers, schools, jurisdictions and the department to consider whether the 25 hour requirement will be removed.

The need to consider alternative funding models

The current funding model has created dilemmas. For example, a common strategy among participating schools is to implement a credit recovery program. Generally, such a program means that students who do not successfully meet all outcomes at the conclusion of a course are given opportunities to complete outcomes in an alternative setting supported by a teacher after the course has been completed. While such an opportunity is very supportive of student learning and responds to the individual needs of students, it can create a dilemma if funding is considered. Should the school claim Credit Enrolment Unit (CEU) funding for the failed course? Doing so would result in a failing grade on the student transcript but would result in funding. If the school does indeed report the failing grade, should the school make a second request for funding once the student has completed the alternative programming to demonstrate that outcomes have been met? Another decision could be to withhold the reporting of the final grade until the student has completed the alternative measures and, as a result, avoid the failing grade on the student transcript but only be funded once. If this is the case, then additional funding is not available to support



student learning. However, in the first case, it could be argued that the school received too much additional funding, as the additional programming may not necessarily use the same amount of resources as the original program that the student failed. Unfortunately, a dilemma such as this may have led schools to make decisions that may be in the best interest of funding but not necessarily in the best interest of learning.

### Next Steps

As the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project moves into the three-year pilot phase, the following steps will be taken to address the emerging issues identified above:

- Encourage sustained collaboration among participating principals with a view to maintaining a supportive professional network.
- Support the use of the *Tell Them From Me* survey as a tool to engage students to take an active role as learning partners and co-designers of their learning environment through professional development.
- Provide financial support to schools to facilitate ongoing collaborative meetings and visitations between participating schools.
- Link the work of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project with the work of other projects and initiatives within the department to support the transformation of the education system in Alberta.
- Extend the communication of the progress at participating schools to external stakeholders to encourage a broader understanding about the practical aspects of transforming high school organization and delivery.
- Consult with the project's Internal Advisory Team, External Advisory Committee, participating principals and superintendents and other education stakeholder groups to assemble ideas for alternative accountability and funding models that would encourage decisions that best support student learning.

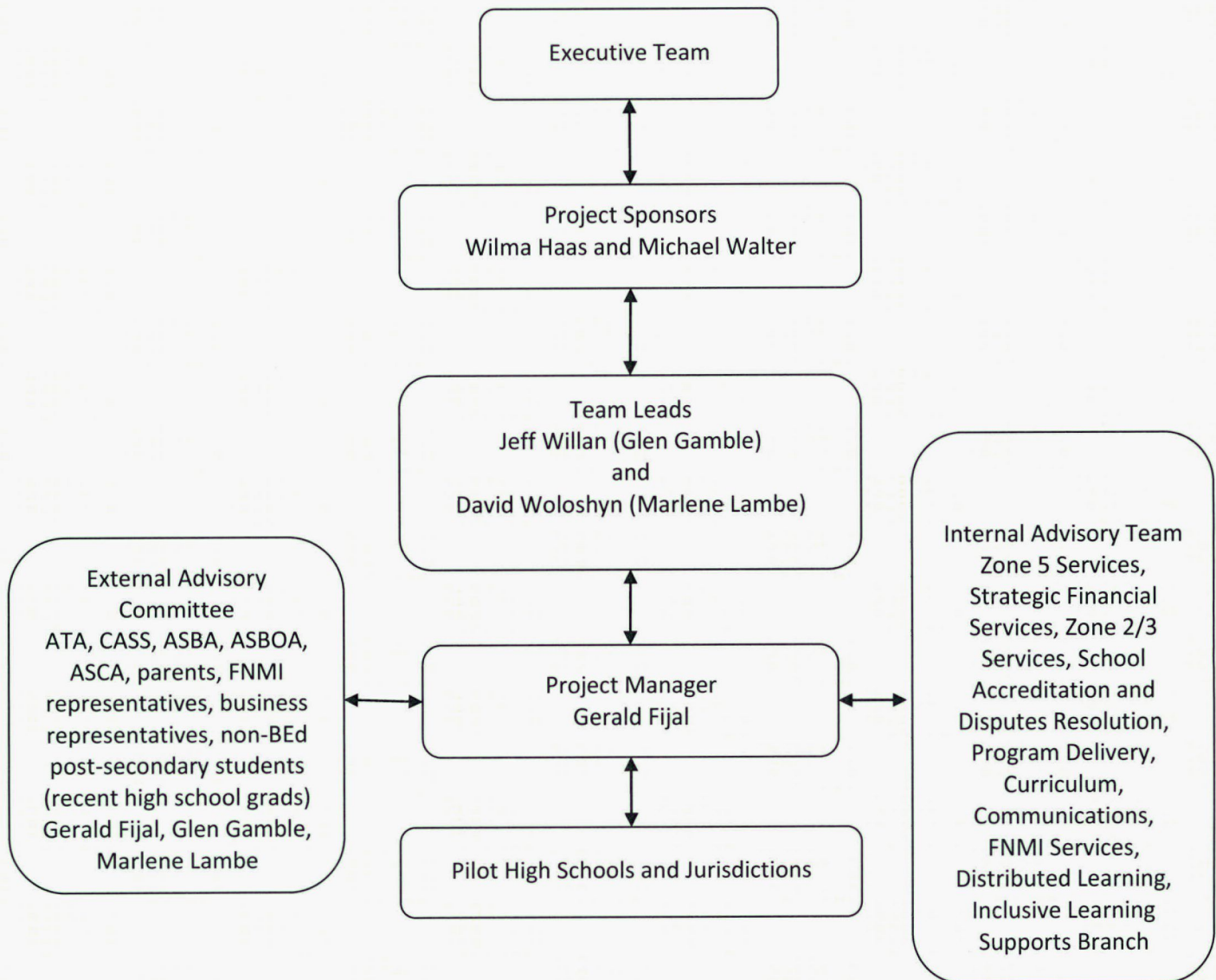


**Appendix A: Participating Schools and Jurisdictions**

| <b>School</b>                                  | <b>Jurisdiction</b>  |
|--|--|
| Grand Prairie Composite (1141)                 | Grande Prairie School District #2357 (3240)                              |
| Bellerose Composite (2556)                     | St. Albert Protestant Separate School District #6 (7020)                 |
| Olds High School (5115)                        | Chinook's Edge School Division #73 (0053)                                |
| JC Charyk School (5844)                        | Prairie Land Regional Division #25 (1115)                                |
| Bishop McNally High School (8907)              | Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District #1 (4010)                |
| Holy Trinity Academy (5371)                    | Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate Regional Division #3 (4208)        |
| Catholic Central High School (6476)            | Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division #4 (4481)          |
| M.E. Lazerte High School (7063)                | Edmonton School District #7 (3020)                                       |
| Spruce Grove Composite (2233)                  | Parkland School Division #70 (2305)                                      |
| William E Hay Composite (4644)                 | Clearview School Division #71 (0052)                                     |
| Peace Wapiti Academy (0590)                    | Peace Wapiti School Division #76 (3345)                                  |
| Edwin Parr Composite (2601)                    | Aspen View Schools Regional Division #19 (2125)                          |
| St. Mary of the Lake Catholic School (1675)    | Living Waters Catholic Schools Regional Division #42 (0047)              |
| James Fowler High School (9825)                | Calgary School District #19 (3030)                                       |
| Ecole St. Marguerite-Bourgeoys (8707)          | Conseil Scolaire Catholique et Francophone du Sud de l'Alberta #4 (0097) |
| Archbishop O'Leary Catholic High School (8404) | Edmonton Catholic Separate School District #7 (0110)                     |



## Appendix B: Governance Structure





## Appendix C: Summary of Evaluations of Collaborative Meetings

### High School Flexibility Enhancement Project

#### Fall Meeting Evaluation

November 23, 2009

Please indicate your agreement with each of the statements below (**average results indicated in brackets**):

1. The November 2009 Fall Meeting provided me with a good opportunity to meet with colleagues from other pilot schools.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.86)            |          |       |                |

2. The morning presentations gave me a good idea of the progress of the project in the other pilot schools.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.86)            |          |       |                |

3. The morning presentations helped me to formulate questions for the group meetings in the afternoon.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.27)            |          |       |                |

4. I had opportunities throughout the day to converse with colleagues from other pilot schools.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.46)            |          |       |                |

5. I had opportunities to ask the questions that I needed answered of colleagues in the other pilot schools.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.32)            |          |       |                |



6. The discussion questions for the afternoon group meetings were helpful in exploring significant issues for the project.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.27)            |          |       |                |

7. The 2009 Fall Meeting has provided me with ideas to help me in the direction of the project at my school.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.65)            |          |       |                |

8. The 2009 Fall Meeting has provided me with ideas of where I can get support for the project at my school.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.08)            |          |       |                |

9. The 2009 Fall Meeting has helped me understand the "next steps" and my responsibilities in fulfilling these "next steps" for the project.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.35)            |          |       |                |

10. The 2009 Fall Meeting fulfilled its primary purpose to support collaboration among the 16 participating schools.

|                   |          |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| 1                 | 2        | 3     | 4              |
| (3.72)            |          |       |                |



Please use the space below for any general comments or ideas for our next meeting of participants in Spring 2010. **(responses aggregated below)**

- It is so valuable to hear what other schools are doing. Let us hear from them all.
- Time to share.
- Timetabling will be key.
- Share project-based learning items.
- Let's invite other participants in our schools to these meetings (lead person returns only).
- Good location/food.
- Very good – really enjoyed it!
- Subject specific presentations.
- Very useful in table discussions – getting down to the issues then – would be excellent to open it up to even more teachers.
- There are so many ideas out there – it is so interesting to take the teaching “out of the box” now!
- Carry on. Teacher collaboration amongst schools.
- I would have liked 10 or 15 minutes to meet with my team in between the morning and afternoon.
- Although 8 minute presentations seem small, it totaled approximately 160 minutes (too long)
- It was a great meeting. Thank you for keeping us on task with the project.
- Next meeting
  - Have an opportunity to share ideas from project with all schools. Maybe table groups change every 15 – 30 minutes – i.e., set up tables for certain questions. Participants move to different tables
  - Have opportunity to ask questions of all group members. Solutions might come from the group.
  - What has changed?
  - What will next year look like?
  - Perhaps more time in smaller working groups.
  - Set April date soon to ensure all team members can attend and not booked into other things.
- The morning session was a lot to digest without time to process/discuss after each presentation. It would have been nice to sit at tables during the presentations (easier to take notes, etc.).
- I felt the morning session where groups presented their projects that there was a bit of a space crunch – i.e., hard to take notes.
- Nice to meet with project members.
- Morning very useful.
- More time for open discussions in afternoon sessions – “How is your school...?” (especially around 25 hours and timetables)
- Difficult to collaborate with every school is looking at widely different approaches.
- Maybe in the spring ask schools to choose 1 or 2 major initiatives and meet within that initiative (e.g., all schools that are looking at timetable redesign: group 1; all schools changing method of delivery: group 2; all schools looking at focusing on teacher/student relationships: group 3).
- Break us into small groups based on what types of approaches we're taking.
- Updates.
- Challenges.
- Scheduling – how are people using their timetables to support this work – scheduling students in classes not changing the end/start times.



- Alberta  
Freedom To Create. Spirit To Achieve.



- Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree
- (4.37)

- Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree  
(4.33)

- Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree
- 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
- (4.28)

- Strongly Disagree                      Strongly Agree
- 1                      2                      3                      4                      5
- (3.83)

- Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree
- (4.12)

- Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree
- (3.73)

- Yes (7)                      No (36)







***Learning our Way Forward from the Inside Out:  
International Perspectives on Innovation in Education***

***What Makes for a Great School?***

***Supporting the Journey from Kindergarten to Graduation***

**A Challenge Dialogue™**

***Prepared by***

**Stephen Murgatroyd, J C Couture, Chris Gonnet, Pasi Sahlberg**

**December 2010**



## Purpose of the Dialogue

This challenge dialogue is intended as a way of generating ideas for the Alberta–Finland partnership and the meeting of this partnership planned for March 18 and 19, 2011, in Edmonton.

It is also intended to help shape the development of both the Alberta and Finnish school systems. In Alberta, where the government has recently published *Inspiring Education*, *Setting the Direction* and *Inspiring Action on Education*, significant change is about to occur. Finland, as it looks to its future, also envisages changes in the school system—changes aimed at maintaining the success of Finnish schools, especially with respect to ensuring that all students have equitable access to high-quality education.

Finland and Alberta are among the leading public education jurisdictions in the world with respect to performance on certain indicators.<sup>1</sup> Both jurisdictions seek to continuously improve—and, if necessary, transform—their school systems so as to provide for high-quality education and skills for their citizens. What drives these decisions are the socioeconomic needs of the respective societies, a commitment to social equity and a desire to provide citizens with the knowledge and skills they require to be effective citizens in a vibrant democracy. The fundamental idea of the partnership is to find a way of learning from each other so that both jurisdictions can continue to demonstrate strong success in their respective school systems.

## The Key Challenge: What Makes for a Great School?

The underlying challenge is to identify the actions necessary to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and focus of school systems in Alberta and Finland during the next five years. That is, given that both systems have demonstrated levels of effectiveness and performance, what changes need to be made to achieve the following objectives:

- Leverage early childhood education?
- Sustain effective school performance?
- Enhance the level of student engagement and commitment to education?
- Tackle some of the issues in the education systems of Alberta and Finland that are well documented and researched?
- Provide a platform for developing an educational system that supports public education, professional teachers, mindful teaching and engaged learners?

## Background

Here are some observations about Alberta and Finland that will provide some context for the discussion that follows:

1. Alberta is a predominantly public school system. While some charter and for-profit schools operate in Alberta, most K to 12 students attend a public or a publicly funded Catholic school. The government has no plans to change the balance of public, charter and private schools.

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<sup>1</sup> These are the OECD Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) scores. See <http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=82> for more information.



2. Finland also has a predominantly public school system. Founding a new private comprehensive school in Finland requires a political decision by the Council of State. When founded, private schools receive a state grant comparable to that given to municipal schools of the same size. However, private schools are prohibited from charging tuition fees and are obliged to admit all pupils on the same basis as the corresponding municipal school. Existing private comprehensive schools are mostly faith-based or Steiner schools.
3. Finland ranks high in the world on key Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) indicators and leads Canada in the PISA data. It is the only jurisdiction in the world to have maintained a significant lead in every administration of PISA. It is a nation committed to learning.
4. Despite its success, Alberta faces a number of challenges, among them the following:
  - a. *Alberta has a high level of drop out at the high school level.* Overall, 11.3 per cent of students drop out in Alberta, which is tied with Quebec for second place behind Manitoba. In cities, the dropout rate is 9.9 per cent (Alberta is third after Manitoba and Quebec), in small towns 17 per cent (first among all provinces) and in rural areas 21.7 per cent (first among all provinces).
  - b. *Alberta has the lowest high-school-to-postsecondary transition rate of all provinces.* Only 48 per cent of high school students go on to postsecondary education within four years of leaving high school. The national average is 62 per cent.
  - c. *Literacy levels among employees are problematic.* A 2006 study of the workforce (2.1 million persons) revealed that some 850,000 employees (40 per cent of those employed) have a level of functional literacy below that required for the positions they occupy.
  - d. *Poor performance of First Nations and Métis students.* In the past three years, fewer than 15 per cent of Grade 9 students in band-operated schools and fewer than 50 per cent of First Nations students in other school systems met the acceptable standard in mathematics, science and social studies. So serious are these issues that the minister of education intervened in the Northland School Division in 2010 because of poor performance. Completion rates for Aboriginal students in Alberta's postsecondary system are also low: 42 per cent as compared to 60 per cent for the non-aboriginal students who attend colleges and universities in Alberta.
  - e. *Significant erosion in support to students with special needs.* In 2009, 41 per cent of teachers reported that services and support for special needs students had declined in comparison to previous years.<sup>2</sup>
  - f. *Levels of student engagement in learning are low.* A study by the Metiri Group (US) suggests that, on average, student engagement in their junior and senior high school work is less than 20 per cent. Fifty-one per cent are tactically involved, 21 per cent are compliant, 5 per cent are withdrawn and 3 per cent are defiant. Data for Alberta from a number of masters and doctoral studies show a similar pattern.
  - g. *Teacher turnover remains a concern.* Average teacher turnover in Alberta is 38 per cent over a four-year period. In other words, just 62 per cent of teachers remain in the classroom four years after they began. Teaching (with the exception of those who teach students with special needs) is no longer considered a "top ten" Canadian job.<sup>3</sup> One third of new teachers express the view that they will leave the profession within five years of starting their first teaching position.
  - h. *The quality of the physical infrastructure for education is declining.* Each year the government assesses the fitness of Alberta school buildings, rating them on a simple scale from "good" to

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Alberta Teachers Association (2010) *Looking Forward—Emerging Trends and Strategic Possibilities for Enhancing Teaching and Learning in Alberta Schools, 2009–12*. Edmonton, AB, page 9.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.alec.co.uk/free-career-assessment/top-10-most-popular-careers.htm> for details. Accessed on June 5<sup>th</sup> 2010.



- “poor.” Since 2005, the number in the “fair” category has increased (from 25 per cent to 29 per cent), while the number in the “good” category has declined (from 73 per cent to 67 per cent).<sup>4</sup>
- i. *Technology adoption levels are modest.* Some 50 per cent of Alberta school teachers use technology regularly and appropriately in their lessons,<sup>5</sup> though recent research suggests that getting past this number will require significant investments in professional development and a freeing up of curriculum demands on teachers.<sup>6</sup>
  - j. *Employers are becoming less satisfied with the outcomes of Alberta’s investments in education.* In the tri-annual survey of employer satisfaction with graduates (including apprenticeship graduates) of the postsecondary system, satisfaction declined from 94 per cent in 2005/06 to 88 per cent in 2007/08.<sup>7</sup>
5. Finland, one of the world’s leading education systems, also has a number of challenges, among them the following:
    - a. *The cost structure of the education system.* Financial constraints in post-recession Finland have affected the education system. Schools are being challenged to become more productive, in some cases by reducing their special education and counselling services or by increasing class size.
    - b. *The balance of the school curriculum.* In light of the skills demanded for the Finnish economy, creativity and physical education are being downplayed.
    - c. *The balance between school-based curriculum development and the role of the government in prescribing the curriculum.* There is a growing debate in Finland about where the locus of control over the curriculum should reside.
    - d. *Adjusting Finland’s education system to the requirements of the EU’s competency-based qualifications structure, as outlined in the EU’s qualifications framework.* The framework calls for more broadly based skills, especially in vocational education.
    - e. *Ensuring social inclusion.* The challenge for Finland is striving to maintain not only high student performance but also an equitable education system. (Finland currently has one of the most equitable education systems in the world.)
    - f. *Leveraging technology for effective instruction and increasing the use of technology for problem-solving and project-based learning.*
    - g. *Rethinking the mix between vocational education and academic education.* Finland is looking to find a better balance between vocational content and academic requirements, a challenge that Alberta shares.
  6. Schools in both Alberta and Finland are governed by a model that recognizes the significant role that locally elected bodies play, under the general direction of the government, in managing education. Both jurisdictions, though for different reasons, share the challenge of achieving a balance between the three domains of governance: provincial/national, school jurisdiction and the school itself.
  7. Both Alberta and Finland have real concerns about resources:
    - a. The costs, quality and value of teacher education and professional development.
    - b. The costs, effectiveness and model for supporting students with special needs.
    - c. The costs of and return on investment for educational technology.
    - d. The costs and value of administrative reporting and accountability.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Government of Alberta (2009) *Measuring Up—Progress Report on the Government of Alberta Business Plan*.

<sup>5</sup> Murgatroyd, S and Couture, JC (2010) *Using Technology to Support Real Learning First in Alberta Schools*. Edmonton, AB: The Alberta Teachers’ Association.

<sup>6</sup> Metiri Group and the University of Calgary (2009) *Emerge—One to One Lap Top Learning Initiative: Year One Report*. Edmonton, AB: Government of Alberta, Ministry of Education.

<sup>7</sup> Source: Government of Alberta (2009) *Measuring Up—Progress Report on the Government of Alberta Business Plan*.



- e. The costs and nature of governance.
- 8. Alberta and Finland differ significantly in the recognition they accord to teaching as a profession.
  - a. In Finland, teaching is a highly regarded profession for which there is great demand and a long-term commitment. In Alberta, teaching is increasingly regarded as a transitional profession. Many trained teachers choose either not to enter the profession or to leave after teaching for a few years.
  - b. In Finland, teachers do not teach as many hours in the day as do Alberta teachers. They spend the extra time developing curriculum, planning lessons and collaborating with other teachers on learning strategies to assist students experiencing learning challenges.
  - c. In Finland, teachers have significant control over what they teach and how they teach. In Alberta, the curriculum is highly specified by the Curriculum Branch of the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Education (select teachers are highly engaged in developing curriculum at this jurisdictional level) and have some control over how they teach. In Finland, the ministry specifies a framework for curriculum, but teachers have significant opportunities to add to the "what" and "how" of their teaching.
- 9. Alberta intends to adopt a new *School Act* in 2011, which will initiate several reforms to education, among them the following:
  - a. The school-leaving age will increase from 16 to 17.
  - b. The focus will shift from classroom-based learning for a fixed number of hours of instruction per credit to a more flexible form that will enable students to work at different paces. Not all credit will be classroom based.
  - c. A broader-based model of governance will be introduced into the existing structure of school boards.
  - d. Bureaucracy will be reduced.
  - e. The focus will shift away from time spent in the classroom for credit to a competency-based framework linked to an understanding of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills: literacy; numeracy; critical thinking and problem solving; creativity and innovation; social responsibility and cultural, global and environmental awareness; communications; digital literacy; lifelong learning, self-direction and personal management; and collaboration and leadership.

## Eight Key Challenges

### 1. Rethinking Governance

Both Alberta and Finland are rethinking the relationship between three levels of decision-making with respect to students and learning: (1) the role of government in framing, shaping and deciding matters of curriculum, assessment and standards, (2) the role of locally elected officials (school trustees in Alberta and municipal government in Finland) in managing resources, connecting schools to the community and ensuring that stakeholders are engaged in strategy and evaluative activities and (3) the level of autonomy that schools are permitted in hiring teachers, shaping curriculum, assessment, evaluation and strategy. The OECD analysis strongly suggests that getting this balance right is a necessary condition for high performance outcomes.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See OECD PISA Study School Factors Related to Quality and Equity (2000) to at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/20/34668095.pdf> accessed October 5<sup>th</sup> 2010.

Interestingly, Finland is considering strengthening the role of the national government at the very moment when Alberta is looking at reducing the role of government and giving school boards and schools more independence.

Alberta is also looking to strengthen the involvement of the community in the governance of their schools. In other words, without changing the legal structure of its 61 school boards that have locally elected trustees, Alberta wishes to add governance models that encourages local stakeholders to become more engaged. These models include forming community councils for groups of schools and linking youth councils to specific schools.

***Assumptions:***

1. The government needs to set direction and provide sufficient guidance in terms of expectations (curriculum frameworks) and standards (suggested outcomes) without being directive to the point of deprofessionalizing teachers and trying to run the schools from a bureaucratic base. Finding the balance between “framing and shaping” and “telling and directing” is difficult. Few governments think they have this right.
2. The government also has to assure the public that its investments in education are (a) appropriate in terms of level and targeting of investment, (b) efficient and effective in how they are used and (c) conducive to an environment in which every student has equitable access to and a chance to succeed in public education.
3. Locally elected officials are responsible for building, maintaining and supporting schools in their district that are safe, that provide appropriate education, that meet the community’s expectations and that produce results demonstrating both proficient students and a high degree of equity between schools.
4. Locally elected officials are also responsible for hiring, developing and supporting teachers and other professional and semi-professional personnel who provide and support education. In Alberta, they are also responsible for determining pay and working conditions.
5. Local district leaders are responsible for encouraging and enabling innovation and supporting the development of the “system” of schools locally.
6. Parent councils and local community organizations can also provide valuable guidance to schools in terms of setting strategic priorities, focus and development.
7. Schools are responsible for providing high-quality educational opportunities and experiences that engage learners in the work of learning, require learning performance and ensure the development of social and emotional intelligence (character).
8. Schools are responsible for turning curriculum expectations into learning opportunities, evaluating student progress and assuring stakeholders that resources are being used efficiently and effectively and that the school is engaged with the community.
9. Professional teacher and administrator associations have a critical role to play in supporting the professional growth of teachers by (a) ensuring that high-quality teachers enter the profession, (b) undertaking research, (c) providing professional development and other support and (d) encouraging members to engage in critical self-reflection.



10. Professional associations have a key role in encouraging and enabling the development of effective schools, effective teachers and meaningful curriculum.
11. Professional associations need to represent teachers when they are challenged or threatened by political circumstance or challenged in terms of their professional integrity.

Other key stakeholders—parents, students and local business—also play a critical role, but are not directly involved in the balance of power and authority.

Here is what the Government of Alberta means by shared governance:

While traditionally thought of approaches to “ownership” still apply to the system (i.e., teachers are responsible for their classroom, principals are responsible for their school, etc.), realizing a new vision for governance will mean greater commitment to cross-sectoral collaboration between education, health and social agencies as well as not-for-profit organizations. The student voice will be listened to and considered in decision making. *Approaches to governance which are more collaborative, balanced between the provincial government and local school authorities, and which reflect the unique needs of local communities, will be explored.* Building on our current model of elected school boards to strengthen the local democratic process might involve *enhanced governance at the local level through, for example, community or volunteer appointments to ensure balanced Aboriginal representation on a board responsible for a large number of Aboriginal students or which has a tuition agreement with a First Nation* (emphasis added).

## 2. Making Learning Meaningful: The “Personalization” of Learning

“Personalized learning,” which is informing much thinking about the future of school systems, can mean a number of things:

1. *Curriculum designed uniquely for each learner:* This approach likely involves customizing learning, based on an assessment of the learner’s needs, learning style and capacities. Although some special-needs students may receive this form of instruction, it is unlikely to be widespread and available to all students in a public education system.
2. *A personal route through curriculum choices linked to interests, career planning and skills.* In this approach, students would choose courses that reflect their interests and personality. Finland introduced this innovation into its high schools about a decade ago.
3. *One-to-one instruction:* This approach involves ensuring that learners receive personal instruction for each subject. Such an approach is unlikely in a public education system.
4. *Online learning, anytime, anywhere:* This approach involves e-learning and is not necessarily personalized. Some school systems consider e-learning as a way of personalizing education, especially when learners can start any course at any time and take the exam or be assessed whenever they feel ready.
5. *Work-based learning credits plus credits from completed school or non-school courses equals a high school diploma or matriculation:* This approach allows high school students who have paying jobs to receive credit both for their school work and for their work-based learning. As a result, their learning is connected to their personal choices.
6. *Challenged-based learning credits:* In this approach, learners, when they feel ready, ask to be assessed and, if they succeed on the assessment, receive credit. At that point, they have learned what they need to be successful.
7. *Changing the pace of learning:* Learners are allowed to learn at their own pace and to ask for an assessment at any time.

8. *Learning linked to styles:* This approach is a form of differentiated instruction in which learning is linked to different learning styles. The same objectives are achieved through a variety of learning routes.
9. *Differential supports for learning:* Almost all “credited” learning (learning for credit) is overseen by teachers. However, there are others in the community with significant knowledge and skill (including musicians, artists, artisans, craftsmen and women, culinary artists) who could make learning possible. Why not permit them to offer instruction and allow learners to have it recognized on their profile?

To sum up, personalized learning has these characteristics:

- Students progress in programs at a pace that suits their needs and enhances their success.
- Students build on their individual strengths and achievements, pursue their passions and interests, and learn in ways that are consistent with their individual learning styles.
- Barriers to learning are reduced by allowing more flexible hours of instruction and schedules.
- Students not only have access to a greater variety of learning experiences that include and extend beyond traditional education settings but also benefit from increased community involvement in their learning.
- Multidisciplinary learning teams comprising teachers, teacher assistants, health professionals, social workers, community members and parents provide “wraparound” supports and services to optimize student success.
- Students contribute to diverse learning communities in which the social component of learning and the development and sharing of knowledge is central to their educational experience.
- Technology and community-based activities are used to enrich learning experiences and enable students to apply their learning in real-life contexts.
- There is more emphasis on assessment *for* learning (that is, an ongoing exchange between students and teachers about the progress that the student is making in achieving clearly specified outcomes).
- Students are lifelong learners who thrive in, and adapt to, a complex and rapidly changing world.

Alberta could adopt the model of the Finnish high school that is characterized by shorter courses, a high degree of student choice over when they study and with whom, and a credit-based system as opposed to grade-level learning. Finland could consider changing its vocational education schools to the more integrated approach to vocational education taken in Alberta.

**Assumptions:**

1. Personalized learning means giving students more option to obtaining a high school diploma or matriculation.
2. Personalized learning means more opportunities to pace when study occurs and when assessment occurs. Students can ask for an assessment when they feel ready to do so. As a result, learning is no longer linked to “time served in the classroom” but to outcomes.
3. Personalized learning requires a significant investment in counselling and guidance.
4. Learners can study courses with minimum prerequisites.
5. Learners can gain credit toward their schooling from a variety of sources: International Baccalaureate, company-based training, college or university credit and music certification programs (such as those offered by the Royal Academy of Music).
6. Learners develop a learning portfolio that can be used to gain admission to university or college.
7. Students collaborate and have a voice in how, where, when and the rate at which they learn. They are also responsible for their choices.



8. All students are empowered to participate in self-reflection and evaluation throughout their education.

### **3. Social Inclusion and Inclusive Education**

The challenge in both Finland and Alberta is to ensure that students have equal access to, and an equal chance to succeed in, high-quality education. These two conditions are important. Having access but not the ability to succeed creates a “revolving door” for failure. The critical condition for success of an education system is that resources are applied differentially (recognizing constraints) to ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve their potential in the public school system. Differential resource allocation would apply to Aboriginal students in Alberta, to the Sami people of northern Finland and to any students who have complex needs or learning disabilities.

Finland performs remarkably well with respect to inclusivity. The difference in outcome between schools (as measured by PISA) is less than the difference in outcome within schools. Alberta is another story: some schools perform considerably better than others in terms of outcomes. School choice is a real social issue.

#### ***Assumptions:***

1. All decisions are based on the needs and interests of students.
2. Expectations are high for all students, and a number of pathways are used to ensure that they succeed. Learning is personalized.
3. Outcomes in the programs of study are the starting point for planning instruction for students. Although the process will vary depending on the individual, the outcome is what matters.
4. Programs of study are complemented with a continuum of supports and services. Classrooms, schools, school authorities and a specialist community are equipped to ensure that students have their needs met.
5. Programs of study and measures of achievement will continue to be accessible to all students.
6. School-based expertise is augmented by current research and new technologies to support teachers.
7. Teachers have resources and tools to support them in using the programs of study in more robust ways to address the diverse learning needs of all students.
8. Accessible learning resources are available so that students are provided with learning opportunities that address their interests, strengths and needs.
9. Students demonstrate their learning in multiple ways, including through refined assessment strategies that measure their progress and growth.
10. Principals lead in creating positive learning cultures in which all students and staff feel welcomed and supported.
11. Teachers are skilled in collaborating effectively with parents, principals, teacher assistants, psychologists and other specialists.
12. Parents are included as important and respected members of their child’s learning team.

Alberta has a long way to go to ensure equity of access *and success* in education. Finland, which has done much to reduce inequities between schools, still has much to do to reduce differences in performance and outcome *within* schools. Social inclusion is a major objective of the education system in the United Kingdom (in the terms outlined here), but that country’s progress has been problematic for a variety of reasons.

Achieving social inclusion is a challenge, especially in the area of special education. In 2010, the Government of Alberta published *Setting the Direction*, which outlines a new approach to special education, one involving a shift from a medical model in which students are categorized by the definition of their “condition” to a model that seeks to identify capabilities and possibilities. Such an approach involves the following requirements:

1. Collaboration of the deepest kind between parents and providers.
2. Customizing and personalizing curriculum and learning to take into account the potential of, and constraints faced by, the learner.
3. Using technology to render learning resources accessible.
4. Significant training and developmental support for teachers.
5. Additional capacities in classrooms to support learning and teaching, including the employment of learning coaches.

Although social inclusion is a common policy objective in developed countries, few achieve it.

#### **4. A Relevant and Meaningful Curriculum**

The Grade 7 curriculum in Alberta has more than 1,300 objectives that are to be taught in 182 days. The equivalent curriculum in Finland has less than half this number of curriculum outcomes to be taught in considerably fewer classroom hours.

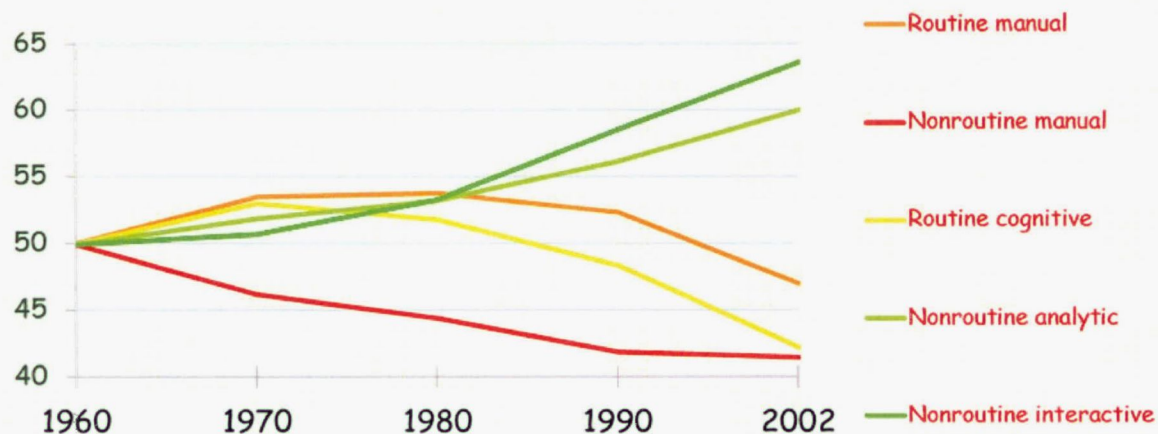
A great deal of the curriculum at the high school level in Alberta is driven by the requirements of postsecondary educational institutions, especially colleges and universities. Yet less than half of the students who attend high schools in Alberta go on to attend universities or colleges, and many of those who do will not complete year one of their college or university program (the current estimate is that 15 per cent drop out before the end of year one). The curriculum is being driven by needs that do not reflect the needs of the majority of those attending school or the majority of those who employ them.

In its decennial studies of skill demands, the OECD shows that the demand for skills has shifted from routine cognitive skills and technical education to an emphasis on social skills and advanced problem-solving/cognitive skills.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See OECD Skills Project reports since 1990. For example, <http://www.slideshare.net/OECDPIISA/oecd-skills-project-4312560>.



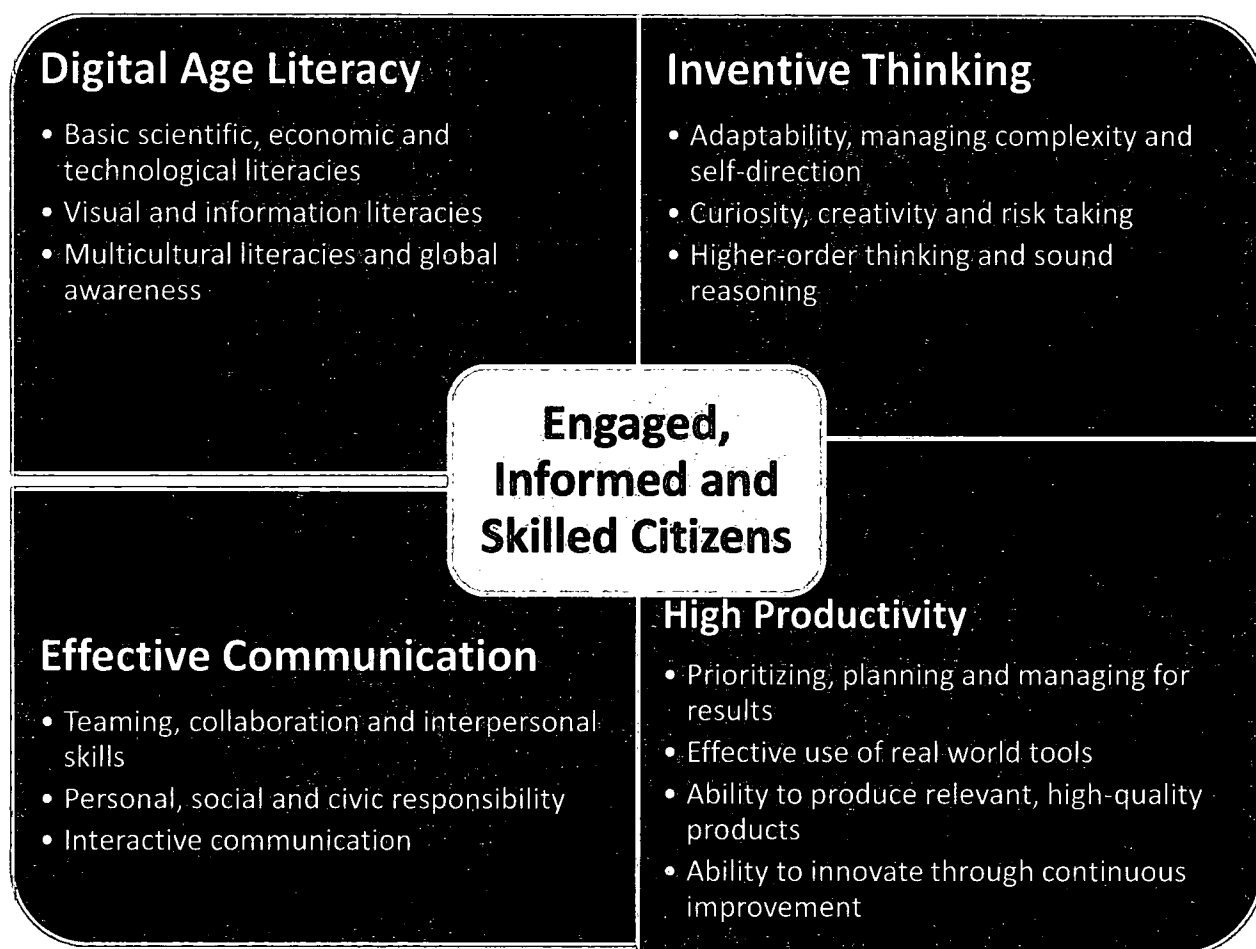


This shift in skills, coupled with the global war for talent, requires jurisdictions to rethink the focus of their curriculum and adopt a different approach to the process of learning. No one is suggesting doing away with courses such as history, social studies, sciences, math, technology and the arts. However, how these courses are experienced needs to change.

Twenty-first century skills are generally assumed to include the following abilities:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Creativity and innovation
- Social responsibility and cultural, global and environmental awareness
- Communication
- Digital literacy
- Lifelong learning, self-direction and personal management
- Collaboration and leadership

The curriculum base is depicted in the following chart.



Yet these so-called 21<sup>st</sup> century skills need to link to more traditional high school subject matter such as history, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and social studies. The knowledge underlying 21<sup>st</sup> century skills may not differ significantly from that involved in 20<sup>th</sup> century skills, but the pedagogy involved in imparting this knowledge and understanding may be very different. The emphasis on collaborative team-based work, civic responsibility and global activity all suggest a renewed pedagogy.

**Assumptions:**

1. At the heart of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills is the ambition that all students will achieve digital and mathematical literacy as well as Level 3 literacy in the international standard of literacy for the knowledge economy.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Adult literacy levels:

Level 5: Very strong skills—able to find information in dense text and make high-level inferences or use specialized background information.

Level 4: Strong skills—able to integrate and synthesize information from complex or lengthy passages.

Level 3: Adequate skills for coping in a complex advanced society. Equivalent to the skill level required for high school completion and college entry.

Level 2: Weak skills—can deal with simple clearly laid out material. May be able to cope with everyday demands but will have difficulty with new situations.

Level 1: Very poor skills—may not be able to determine the correct dosage from the label on a medicine bottle.



2. There are several routes to ensuring that students leave school with the required skills. There is no “silver bullet” or “right way.” Many of these skills can be obtained by studying such courses as science, history, language arts and social studies. In acquiring skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, students need access to different ways of knowing and a foundation in a core curriculum.
3. The process of learning is as important as the content of learning. Mindful teaching should be the support for effective learning.
4. Different students need to experience different kinds of teaching. Visual learners differ from linear learners who differ from exploratory learners, and so on. Differentiated instruction is not an optional but an essential feature of a 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom.
5. Curriculum is the product of a central framework (determined by the government) and a local interpretation of that framework (determined by professional teachers).
6. Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century have a lot in common with 20<sup>th</sup> century skills.<sup>11</sup> The focus is on developing capable citizens who have a passion for learning and have skills relevant to their ambitions and intent.

## 5. Appropriate Technology for Learning

Technology can be a significant tool for accelerating and supporting learning, provided that the tool is seen as just that: a support, a resource and an opportunity, not a substitute for relationship-driven learning.

Finland has undertaken several studies on how technology can be leveraged to advance the learning agenda of the nation.<sup>12</sup> The goal of the *ICTs at School's Everyday Life* project (supported by the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Board of Education in cooperation with industry and commerce) is not only to inform schools and educational administration about the latest developments in ICT but also to develop multiple ways of applying ICT to education. More specifically, the project aims to improve understanding and practice in the following areas:

- ICT tools, infrastructure and usability
- Learning environments and pedagogical models (for example, using social media and mobile learning as part of the school's everyday life)
- Creating content and learning materials
- Developing school communities and supporting professional development and collaboration
- Developing public-private partnership models

The results are expected in 2011. Work is underway in 12 Finnish schools, and 20 schools are involved in the research consortium.

The Government of Alberta has spent close to \$2 billion on educational technology for schools since 1998. This money has been spent on hardware, software and professional development. Although the use of technology continues to grow, its application has presented a number of challenges that

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<sup>11</sup> See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8\\_ehGLqzBVM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_ehGLqzBVM).

<sup>12</sup> See a summary of developments in *OECD Study on Digital Learning Resources As Systematic Innovation—Country Case Study Report on Finland*, available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/1/42159200.pdf>. Accessed on October 3, 2010.

Murgatroyd and Couture (2010) explored in a paper entitled *Using Technology to Support Real Learning First in Alberta Schools*.<sup>13</sup> Based on a critique of technology adoption and implementation, Murgatroyd and Couture suggest that Alberta needs to do the following:

1. Create a learning consortium to review leading practices and test new practices with respect to renewing and transforming the curriculum.
2. Establish a new targeted fund (comparable to AISI but with more focus on local decision making) to help transform 10 schools, in partnership with their respective communities, into major centres of professional development, research and innovation.
3. In consultation with the education partners, establish priorities with respect to future government investments in digital technology.
4. Redesign, in consultation with the faculties of education, the Association and other education partners, Alberta's current programs of study.
5. Work with the education partners to enhance teachers' leadership skills.
6. Ensure that every community in Alberta has broadband access, whether wired or wireless, to the Internet.
7. In collaboration with jurisdictions, universities, colleges and the Association, fund field research to determine the kinds of technologies that optimize student learning.

Many claims are made for technology, and many vendors are competing for what they see as lucrative markets. More significantly, students see certain technologies (searching, texting, tweeting, social media and music) as utility services, not as optional services. They are increasingly disappointed by the general failure to integrate technology into the learning process.

**Assumptions:**

1. Technology is not a substitute for learning based on student–teacher interactions.
2. Technology can be a source for knowledge and information, provided that learners have developed the skills of discrimination and critical thinking. Not all information available online is reliable or complete.
3. Digital devices—especially mobile devices such as the iPad and Smartphones—can be powerful tools for accessing knowledge. Social networking tools can be used to facilitate project-based learning and learning situations that require the co-creation of knowledge.
4. The digital media is rapidly replacing textbooks. Many of these services permit registered teachers to add local content, an arrangement that allows school systems to improve the access that students have to high quality and affordable learning resources.
5. E-learning (online learning) is a proven method of offering high-quality instruction. Many students, especially high school students, find this form of learning as good as (and, in some cases and for some students, better than) classroom instruction, especially in subjects in which they have a high degree of commitment and interest. The evidence is clear that there is no significant difference between learning outcomes from e-learning as opposed to classroom learning.

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<sup>13</sup> Available at <http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Research-Updates/PD-86-17%20Using%20Technology%20to%20Support%20RLE%20in%20Alberta%20Schools.pdf>. Accessed October 6, 2010.



6. For technology to be used effectively as part of the process of learning, teachers need support and professional development. Reading the manual is not enough.
7. Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century without using technology is not something most students can imagine or will find acceptable.
8. Technology changes quickly, and schools need to be able to respond flexibly to opportunities as they occur.
9. To adopt technology successfully, school systems must share effective practices.
10. Giving technology to schools because the government thinks ``it will be good for them`` is a great way to satisfy the needs of vendors but is unlikely to improve learning outcomes or enhance levels of student engagement.
11. Determining whether technology has been successfully adapted involves measuring (a) levels of utilization, (b) increases in student engagement and (c) improvements in learning outcomes. All three conditions need to be considered in assessing the efficacy of technology.
12. The digital divide is real. Some students do not have access to broadband services, and many cannot afford the latest technology. If equity is a driving principle, the digital divide must be addressed.

## 6. Moving from Accountability to Assurance

In an effort to hold schools accountable for performance, governments in a number of OECD countries adopted an approach that tested students at key stages of their schooling. In Alberta, this approach has resulted in high-stakes testing for all students in Grades 3, 6 and 9 as well as for all students completing their high school diploma. Finland has no high-stakes testing during the normal period of schooling. Instead, students' progress is measured by accumulating credits. However, Finland does have matriculation examinations that provide a bridge between the school and postsecondary education.<sup>14</sup> Here's how the National Board of Education of Finland describes the matriculation examinations:

The examination consists of at least four tests; one of them, the test in the candidate's mother tongue, is compulsory for all candidates. The candidate then chooses three other compulsory tests from among the following four tests: the test in the second national language, a foreign language test, the mathematics test, and one test in the general studies battery of tests (sciences and humanities). The candidate may include, in addition, as part of his or her examination, one or more optional tests. There is a separate assessment system for the matriculation examination. The tests are initially checked and assessed by each upper secondary school's teacher of the subject in question and finally by the Finnish Matriculation Examination Board.

Students often take additional time after completing their high school course requirements to prepare for matriculation. This matriculation process is seen as essential for the selection system for postsecondary places. There is strong competition, for example, for teacher education places, and the examination helps identify the most able students. The purpose of the examination, however, is not to assess the performance of the school system (accountability). Accountability is monitored by special studies and occasional sample-based studies of particular issues.

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<sup>14</sup> Universities in Finland accept applicants who have graduated from high school or upper secondary school with an IB (International Baccalaureate), EB (European Baccalaureate) or Reifeprüfung diploma (in any country offering these type of qualifications) or with a Finnish Upper Secondary School Diploma in English.

Finland does, however, take one external assessment very seriously—the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses the performance of Finland’s system against those of others in the OECD. Each time the assessment is undertaken (every three years), Finland appears “best in class” amongst all OECD countries. Although Alberta also ranks very high, it has adopted a completely different accountability framework than its Finnish counterpart.

More recently, a number of jurisdictions that used to use high-stakes testing to measure system accountability have moved away from that approach and have adopted an assurance model.

***Assumptions:***

1. Not all schools have the same history, resources, catchment, intake quality, levels of teacher experience and access to technology. Each school has unique characteristics.
2. Assessing students as if they were equal because they are the same age neglects the significant differences between students of the same age that result from such factors as birth order and month of birth, intelligence and ability, parental support for learning and the availability of social supports. In short, not all 11-year-olds are equal at the point of testing.
3. To be held accountable for its use of public resources and its work, a school needs to own its work: its strategic intent and purpose, its methods of teaching and its process for evaluating and supporting students.
4. Schools want to be accountable for their work and the performance of their students.
5. Schools can use sampling, teacher evaluation (if teachers are trained and supported to perform evaluations) and other measures (peer evaluation, parent evaluation, self-tests) to assess performance and progress.
6. Rather than having their performance based on a single set of measures (such as provincial achievement tests or matriculation scores), schools should develop a plan that spells out performance objectives and then report on the progress made in achieving those objectives.
7. The primary level of accountability in the school system rests with professional teachers undertaking professional student assessments.
8. School boards hold schools accountable for living up to their commitments and assurances.
9. When a school is clearly unable to meet its own commitments and intent, the school board needs to support the school in planning changes.

## **7. Instructional Leadership**

A school is more than a place where teachers meet students and teach. It is an organization that has rules, culture, focus and a variety of other unique features. No two schools are the same, despite having similar resources and similar strategic intentions. Indeed, one of the fascinating aspects of education is how different one school can be from another.

Studies of school effectiveness conducted by David Reynolds, Sir Michael Rutter and other researchers in the early 1980s to the mid-1990s demonstrated that schools as organizations can affect student performance. Their findings appear in such books as *15,000 Hours—Secondary Schools and Their Effects*



on Children (Rutter et al, 1982<sup>15</sup>) and *The Comprehensive Experiment* (Reynolds, Sullivan and Murgatroyd, 1987<sup>16</sup>). According to these authors, the key variables affecting student performance are (1) the culture and history of the school and (2) the style of instructional leadership exercised by the principal or head teacher. The authors concluded that these two variables accounted for between 8 and 10 per cent of the difference between high- and low-performing schools. Principals and school leaders can make a big difference in the school by doing the following:

1. Shaping the experience of schooling for a generation or more of students.
2. Shaping the experience of new teachers as they begin their teaching careers.
3. Shaping the experience of teachers at each stage of their professional development.
4. Being an inspiration through their leadership and personality.
5. Enabling innovation.
6. Being efficient and effective problem solvers.
7. Shielding teachers from bureaucracy.
8. Being the voice of the school in the community.
9. Championing the school at each opportunity.
10. Making a difference to each student through their interactions with them.

The quality of instructional leadership varies both by school and by the amount of experience that the leader has. Not all principals or head teachers are “great,” but a great many are. They can make a real difference in how teachers, students and others perceive the school.

**Assumptions:**

1. The culture of a school—its focus, the alignment of teachers and adults in the school to this focus, its processes and procedures, and the way it communicates—significantly affect learning outcomes.
2. Instructional leadership—developing excellence among teachers within the school through careful selection, support and investment in their development—is a critical component in making a good school.
3. Instructional leadership requires principals (head teachers) to focus on teaching and learning rather than on administration only. Principals need to observe teaching, give feedback and systematically develop best practices.
4. Instructional leadership is tough to do. School leaders face many competing demands on their time. However, focussing relentlessly on teaching and learning rather than on administration will almost certainly produce more gains in student performance.
5. Instructional leaders themselves require development and support. Some jurisdictions require teachers to be qualified for the work of school leadership.

## **8. Mindful Teaching**

The key to a great high school is the quality of the teaching. Good teachers make a great deal of difference by engaging students and ennobling learning as a process. In their book *The Mindful*

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<sup>15</sup> Harvard University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor & Francis.

Teacher,<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth MacDonald and Dennis Shirley speak eloquently of the profound influence that teachers can have. They describe seven synergies or practices that characterize mindful teachers:

1. *Open Mindedness*: Mindful teachers engage with their students, parents and the community, find out what their students are interested in and attempt to connect the minds of their students to ideas and learning resources.
2. *Loving and Caring*: Mindful teachers genuinely care about and express appropriate affection for their students.
3. *Professional Expertise*: Mindful teachers demonstrate daily, through their knowledge and processes, their expertise as teachers, coaches, mentors and guides.
4. *Authentic Alignment*: Mindful teachers are genuinely engaged and aligned with the work of the school and express this engagement in their work with students.
5. *Integrative and Harmonizing*: Mindful teachers enable students and others to make connections, see patterns and understand the connectedness of the curriculum.
6. *Collective Responsibility*: Rather than relying on high-stakes testing, mindful teachers understand that they are responsible for evaluating and enabling learning and understanding where a learner is at in his or her journey toward mastering a specific subject. Although one teacher may have a piece of this puzzle, all who teach a student should work together in assessing the student and determining the next steps to take in supporting the student. Good teachers not only understand the importance of collective responsibility but act accordingly.
7. *Stopping*: Mindful teachers stop and critically reflect on their work. They also take time to care for themselves not just occasionally but daily. In other words, they attempt to achieve their own “inner balance” so that they can better support their students.

Since this book was published in 2009, many teachers have reported that, of the seven synergies, the most difficult to achieve consistently is “stopping” and finding a balance for themselves.

**Assumptions:**

1. The quality of teaching and student performance are strongly linked.
2. Good teaching is a function of training, professional development and day-to-day collective support and instructional leadership in a school.
3. Contrary to the popular belief that a teacher is “king or queen” in the classroom, mindful teachers are most effective when they function as part of a team working to ensure that students in their school are engaged in meaningful learning.
4. Schools that cultivate good teachers are more likely to retain those teachers than schools that don’t focus on the quality of teaching.
5. Good teachers create as well as deliver. They use their own knowledge, resources and networks to create meaningful learning experiences for students, and they link these experiences to the “required” curriculum.
6. Good teachers need time to “stop” and find their own balance.

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<sup>17</sup> 2009, Teachers College Press.



- I am concerned that the project is not evolving naturally to what is best practice for each school. There seems to be too much push from Gerry toward the vision he would like to see.
- Re-evaluation of (program) outcomes is an interesting question to ask.
- Good variety in topics – good that it was not necessary to attend every discussion topic – only the relevant topics
- Digital webpage discussion forum may be a useful tool for continuous discussion.
- The table question sheets were a good idea.
- Focus was often quickly lost as a result of confusion to the direction of the project or lack of preparation for what would be talked about, or discussions that would take place.
- Thanks, Gerry. We are forging on – the relationships developing are very helpful.
- Maybe a half-hour re-energizing break – brisk walk?
- I like the idea of collaboration between schools. We will set up visits with others in the future.
- Gerry, you did an excellent job of organizing the day with well-thought out questions for discussions. Excellent organization. I enjoyed your opening comments.
- As always, the topics for the conversations were timely and I got useful ideas to take away.
- Great opportunity to bring “new” and “more” staff members.



## Appendix D: The Transitional Year at Participating Schools

Following is a brief description of the activities that took place over the 2009/2010 Transitional Year at each of the participating schools in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. These descriptions are snapshots of progress of the project in each of the schools. It is important to note that this year was designed to provide an opportunity for participating school communities to explore the possibilities that the removal of the 25 hour requirement would afford them in meeting the needs of their students. It is evident in these descriptions that some schools entered the Transitional Year while they were in the midst of dialogue about redesign with their stakeholders that, in some cases, predated the transitional year by several years. It is also evident that in many cases this year marked the beginning of a dialogue about redesign.

Participating schools are at various stages of the change process. One of the strengths of this project is the insights it provides into the process of transformation within Alberta high schools. However, regardless where each school may be at in the journey towards redesign, all schools are focused on the common goal of using the enhanced flexibility brought about by the removal of the 25 hour requirement to better address student achievement and engagement in their communities.

The information for the following summaries are gleaned from year-end reports submitted by each principal at the end of the 2009/2010 school year. Quotations, where they appear, are direct quotations from the school's report and are indicated by a smaller font.

### **Archbishop O'Leary High School**

Jurisdiction: Edmonton Catholic Separate School District

Location: Edmonton

Grades: 10–12

Population: 1486

Two initiatives were implemented over the 2009/2010 school year at Archbishop O'Leary. In the first initiative students who registered in Design Studies over the year were able to download an on-line design program onto their home computers allowing them to access their projects both at home and at school. This provided the opportunity to have design students extend their learning beyond the confines of the school timetable. The second initiative was the establishment of the Religion 25/35 Christian Action Academy. Students were registered in both Religion 25 and 35 courses concurrently in the first semester. The courses were scheduled in the timetable for an entire afternoon which allowed students to engage in Christian service in placements outside of the school.

Although both of these initiatives did not require any changes to the school-wide timetable they required teachers to explore significant changes to the delivery of the coursework. In both cases teachers found alternatives to traditional face-to-face instruction and were able to support students in meaningful ways both inside and outside of the boundaries of the school timetable and physical structure of the building. The end



result was an observed improvement in the learning conditions for the students involved in these specific initiatives as well as a sense of improvement in the overall atmosphere at the school.

Overall, the initiatives launched during the Flexibility Enhancement Project have given O'Leary students the flexibility to work past whatever boundaries were previously hindering their achievement. For instance, the completion of Christian Service hours is a major roadblock to some students' completion of Religion 25 and 35. Those students now have the option of the Christian Action Academy, which allows them to spend half of their scheduled semester out in the community doing Christian Service, not simply learning about it. Not only does the CAA remove that roadblock to success, but it significantly enhanced the quality of the life learning of the students enrolled. Students are now making real life connections to the course curriculum, and getting a more authentic Christian education. There is no doubt that the students enrolled in our new or alternative courses are benefitting from the Project, but we have also found that the overall atmosphere in the school is improving as students begin to appreciate new course options, greater flexibility, and a sense that their school is taking their personal needs seriously.

As the school moves into the pilot project these two initiatives will continue and other initiatives are being planned including:

- Fast-track Social Studies – This initiative targets students who are maintaining a high academic average. Time will be blocked in the timetable for the entire year for students to progress through Social 10-1, 20-1 and 30-1 by the end of the school year. As the amount of time blocked is reduced from what traditionally would be needed to progress through these three courses, time will be available for students to explore other coursework.
- Science Academy – Science 20 and Science 30 are made available to students in a combination course scheduled over a semester. Outcomes from both courses will be “re-bundled” into meaningful projects for students. The combination course will focus on hands-on lab work and will include field trip opportunities.

### **Bellerose Composite High School**

Jurisdiction: St. Albert Protestant Separate School District

Location: St. Albert

Grades: 10–12

Population: 860

The 2009/2010 transitional year at Bellerose Composite was used to engage the full school community in a dialogue about potential changes to program organization and delivery and, at the same time, explore some alternative approaches in specific areas.

Community engagement took the form of surveys, large-scale and focus group meetings with students, meetings with parents and ongoing meetings and discussions with staff. Included in the exploration of possibilities was a series of visits to schools in the area as well as other schools participating in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project culminating in reports back to the full staff for consideration. Input and discussions were open and public with all stakeholder groups leading to a high level of “buy-in” when final decisions were made.



In semester two of the 2009/2010 school year alternative delivery of program was explored in two areas. First, a significant change was made to the Knowledge and Employability Program (K&E). In both Grade 10 and 11 teachers were assigned to teach core areas (either Math and Science or English and Social) and integrate activities that would lead their students to successful completion of Physical Education. As one teacher was managing the outcomes from two core areas for a group of students and had the background to engage students in physical education activities, the teacher was able to bundle curricular outcomes in these areas that met the specific needs of the students. Also, it was noted that the teachers were able to develop meaningful relationships with these students helping to motivate them to complete outcomes from three program areas in ways that kept them interested and engaged.

A second initiative focused on the English 20-2 program at the school. In second semester students enrolled in English 20-2 were given the opportunity to progress through outcomes at an accelerated rate and write the final examination in May. If students finished the course early they were able to use the remaining time to pursue other courses or to turn their attention to other coursework where they may need additional help. A set of criteria was established for students to be given the opportunity to fast track their English course. This approach was beneficial for both those students who fast-tracked their English course as well as for those who did not as this smaller group had more potential contact with the teacher until the end of the semester.

Experiences with the above initiatives and the input received from the community engagement led to a decision to continue with the initiatives in the future. As well, the school will be implementing the following beginning the 2010/2011 school year:

- The timetable will be rebuilt to include a daily "Flex Block" where students will have an opportunity to direct their learning to areas of need and/or interest. During the Flex Block teachers will be available to students who require assistance.
- There will be two alternative Math programs available for students. One will be a Pure Math 20 and Pure Math 30 extended program where students will be scheduled for additional time to complete these two courses. There will also be a Math 30 Pure short program for students who have the ability and interest to accelerate their Math program leaving room to study other areas.

### **Bishop McNally High School**

Jurisdiction: Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District

Location: Calgary

Grades: 10–12

Population: 1167

Over the 2009/2010 transitional year, the principal and district administration focused on bringing both the school and wider district community together to "brainstorm" possibilities for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project at Bishop McNally High School. The principal established a group of lead teachers who worked collaboratively to review data and share ideas of ways that program organization and delivery could be redesigned to meet student need. A parallel process was implemented at the wider district level that invited high school teachers and administrators from around the district to share their ideas about possibilities with increased flexibility. These two processes raised a high level of awareness at both the school and district level about the project.



During the 2009/2010 year, the school implemented two strategies as part of its exploration of redesign. The school has had in place a teacher advisory system since its inception. During the transitional year teacher advisors were asked to focus on at least two students per advisory that were identified as students who were “at-risk”. Teacher advisors were expected to keep in close contact with the identified students and their parents and were given tools to help them monitor the progress of these students. Statistics were kept on the number of interactions with students, subject area teachers and parents. At the conclusion of the year the identified group of students earned an average of 36.5 credits.

A second strategy was the development and delivery of a combined Learning Strategies/CALM/CTR 1010 course to support a group of mild/moderate learning disabled students. This course was collaboratively developed by two teachers to explore the possibility of curriculum redesign given the additional flexibility afforded the school through their participation in the project.

The end result of the school and district engagement process coupled with the experiences of the school staff in the two explored strategies led to the development of the project plan to be implemented starting in September 2010. The key components of this plan include:

- The redesign of the school timetable into a 5-period day from a 4-period day. The additional block of time reduces the overall time assigned to each course but reduces overall class sizes throughout the school. Teachers were given the opportunity to collaboratively plan for the reduction of time per course by redesigning their course delivery over the spring and summer of 2010. In addition, the redesigned timetable included a “late start” Friday to give opportunities for teachers to meet on an ongoing basis throughout the year to continue collaborative planning.
- The institution of larger blocks of time on Fridays to encourage project-based approaches to program delivery.
- The alignment of blocks of time for CTS, Fine Arts and ESL courses throughout the timetable to provide larger amounts of time to explore practical outcomes in depth.
- A continued focus on the work of the Teacher Advisor to support individual students.
- An expansion of a student resource center that provides ongoing support for students and provides access to self-directed learning opportunities for students.

### **Catholic Central High School**

Jurisdiction: Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division

Location: Lethbridge

Grades: 10–12

Population: 870

The principal assigned one of the vice-principals at the school to take the lead in working with the school community over the transitional year. A team of interested teachers was assembled who identified the following areas of need to be addressed at the school:

- Opportunities for students to learn at their own pace and at their own skill level.
- Increased time for students and teachers to meet individually or in small groups
- Increased time for students to build essential skills



- Increased flexibility for students who find regular school attendance and regular classroom structures difficult  
Over the transitional year changes were made in the following areas as an exploration of strategies to address the needs outlined above:
- CTS – students were able to demonstrate master of learning outcomes at a pace commensurate with their abilities, interest and needs versus at a pace determined by the timetable;
- Knowledge and Employability – students were assigned to a teacher for a block of time to progress through English, Social, Math and Science in a more flexible format designed by the teacher with input from the students. It was found that flexible scheduling allowed for these students to successfully complete more core work in a more relaxed, student-directed setting.
- Science and Math 10-3/20-3 – students had an opportunity to progress through these subjects in a self-directed learning format at an individualized pace.

The following observation was made at the conclusion of the Transitional Year:

- We see a paradigm shift in thinking already in both our students and teachers from our transitional year. The focus is now on – What do students need to know? By what methods do students learn best? - rather than, “How much time do we have to cover the material?”

At the conclusion of the transitional year, these strategies proved to be effective in supporting the students in the identified programs and a decision was made to expand the strategies to reach the broader student population. The additional strategy that will be implemented in the 2010/2011 school year as the pilot project phase begins:

- Flexible Scheduling for additional learning time – the timetable will be altered shifting from a four-period day to a five-period day. The additional block will be incorporated into the middle of the day where students will have a block of time to eat lunch, meet with teachers, be involved in club activities, attend enrichment classes, seek additional help or pursue self-directed learning. Teachers will be available to students at this time.

Future years of the project will include the addition of classes after 3:00 p.m. delivered within a flexible structure as well as the exploration of a blended CTS/English/Social Studies program being offered in a single block of time.

## **Edwin Parr Composite Community School**

Jurisdiction: Aspen View Regional Division

Location: Athabasca

Grades: 8–12

Population: 612

Over the 2009/2010 transitional year the principal at Edwin Parr Composite worked with the staff to explore the current use of time at the school with a view to designing an alternative bell schedule to better support student learning. Prior to 2009/2010 the staff had been involved in a year-long professional development focus exploring assessment for learning strategies. There was a desire to redesign the timetable and bell schedule to better support what was being learned by the staff about assessment strategies.



Over the transitional year, the principal held monthly meetings of staff and parents to engage both groups in the process of determining the final redesign. Meetings were used to provide an explanation of how introducing added flexibility into the timetable would benefit student learning. As well meetings were used to explore potential alternative timetables and bell schedules. The final outcome of the process was a timetable and bell schedule with the following features that will be implemented beginning the 2010/2011 school year:

- Moving from a 4 period 82-minute blocked schedule to a 5 period 65-minute blocked schedule.
- One of the five blocks serves as a “flex block” where students have an opportunity to direct their learning. In the remaining four blocks of time students are scheduled into classes.
- Every 20 days students will select an area to work in during the flex block over the 20 day period. Students will be able to direct their learning to meet their interest and needs over the flex block. Students may use the flex block to add optional coursework (i.e., CTS) that is not scheduled in their timetable or may use the time for enrichment and remediation opportunities linked to their scheduled classes.
- This approach guarantees a “bedrock” of school-directed time for each course of study complimented by flexible time for students to direct their learning to support their studies or explore optional areas of study. The flexible block allows students to personalize their learning experience at the school.

Over the three years of the project the intent is to decrease the bedrock of school directed time and increase the flexible student directed time. The link between the alternative timetable and the ongoing professional development focus on assessment for learning is captured in the words of the principal:

This transformation from teacher managed content and production to student directed content and production on the field of relevant curricula marks the essence of our project as it entails a massive shift in assessment, grading and reporting practices.

### **Grande Prairie Composite High School**

Jurisdiction: Grande Prairie School District

Location: Grande Prairie

Grades: 10–12

Population: 1591

After considerable discussion with school staff in the year prior to the 2009/2010 transitional year, the school administration instituted a redesigned bell schedule to include a “flex block”. The bell schedule for the transitional year was comprised of five 75 minute periods with the middle 75 minutes acting as a dedicated flex block. During the flex block students were given the opportunity to access teachers to support their work in the regularly scheduled classes. Students were able to receive support for any area in the school as teachers for all areas were made available. During this flex block students were expected to take a break for lunch as well. Another change was made to institute a “quarter system” for three-credit classes rather than an alternating Day A/Day B schedule to accommodate 3-credit courses.



The combination of the flex block and quarter system has led to some observed benefits for students at the school:

- As students have greater responsibility and control over the flex block time they are able to direct their learning to areas of personal need more readily;
- Assignment completion in courses is trending upward;
- The quarter system allows students to focus on a smaller number of courses over an extended period of time;
- As students have the flex block imbedded in the middle of their day, more Grade 11 and 12 students are consciously choosing a full schedule.

In addition to the redesigned bell schedule and timetable, the school implemented a condensed Math 14/24 and Science 14/24 program. These condensed programs allowed the teachers to revisit the outcomes of these programs with a view to determining the essential outcomes encouraging a more active-oriented stance to the students' learning in these programs. Students were assessed using a final summative exam that was parallel to exams written in past years. The success rate in both the science and math program increased dramatically over previous years. There was also an increase in the standard of excellence in the Math 14 program. For students who did not successfully complete the 14 level program, there was an opportunity to retake the course within the same time frame effectively leading to them passing the course in the same amount of time as they would have in previous years. Given that these courses were condensed, students had an opportunity to explore other option areas of interest. The end result was an observed increase in the retention rate of students who had traditionally dropped out before the end of the school year.

The school will continue with the two strategies outlined above over the next three years of this project. In addition, an examination of a teacher advisory program is underway with the entire staff and administration. It is expected that a teacher advisory program will be instituted at the school in the next school year. As well, the staff and administration continues to explore other opportunities to adapt course approaches for individual students throughout all program areas.

### **Holy Trinity Academy**

Jurisdiction: Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate Regional Division

Location: Okotoks

Grades: 10–12

Population: 757

The project plan for Holy Trinity Academy has been focused on addressing an issue with one specific program at the school. The school offers an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program that experiences high attrition of students by Grade 12. In surveying students it became apparent that attrition was due in large part to the lack of choices that students were able to make to explore optional areas if they opted for a full IB program.

In response to student input, for the 2009/2010 school year, the school altered the delivery of two programming areas in the IB; Social Studies and Biology. Grade 10 and 11 Social Studies was condensed into a single course utilizing one block of time in the student's schedule. Additional coursework necessary in Biology was delivered as a series of seminars outside of the traditionally scheduled time rather than as a regularly



scheduled 3-credit course in the student's timetable. This released some additional time for students to explore option areas.

At the conclusion of the 2009/2010 school year the school reported some significant gains in the retention of students in the later years of the IB program. Specifically, Grade 12 enrolments in IB Social Studies more than tripled (from 8 in the previous year to 25) and enrolments in Grade 12 IB English almost doubled (from 15 in the previous year to 28). Although there was a large increase in retention in the IB program courses, the school reports that some students did not use the additional time in the timetable to explore options. The administration will be working with students to encourage them to explore opportunities for optional studies with the additional time available to them.

### **J. C. Charyk Hanna School**

Jurisdiction: Prairie Land Regional Division

Location: Hanna

Grades: 9–12

Population: 402

Over the 2009/2010 transitional year at J. C. Charyk High School an alternative approach to program design and delivery was explored with a group of identified Grade 10 students. For these students, Math, Science, English and Social Studies coursework was made available to them in a self-directed environment supported by materials constructed by two teachers. The Math and Science courses were made available to the students in the first semester managed by one teacher while the English and Social Studies courses were made available to the student in the second semester managed by a different teacher. The administration at the school interviewed each student and parent who entered the self-directed learning program and observed progress of the students over the year.

In addition to this specific initiative, the administration at the school engaged in a number of meetings with parents and teachers to explore ways that additional flexibility could be made available to all students at the school. The experience with the self-directed learning initiative combined with the input from meetings led to a realization about the direction of the project for the future:

The biggest success was the evolution from our first project to where it is today. We were able to learn from our planning, and finally realized that parents in traditional communities still want to see traditional schools. By evolving slowly, we are able to keep certain aspects of the traditional school (blocks, classroom structure) and move to some flexibility by way of open courses (afterhours) and flex time throughout the day.

As the school moves into the 2010/2011 school year, self-directed learning will continue to be made available as an option to those students who may want to pursue it. In addition, the bell schedule and timetable will provide opportunities for all students to explore areas of interest through the institution of "Flex Classes" as well as classes scheduled both before and after school.



Flex Classes will run in a 45-minute daily block. During this block of time teachers will be presenting a variety of learning opportunities associated with the coursework as topics of interest and enrichment. Students will have the opportunity to select from the offerings to become involved in extensions to their learning that meets their interest. In addition, tutorials will be offered on a rotating basis in key courses where students will have an opportunity to receive additional assistance to support their success. These tutorials will be offered in the areas of math and science.

Also being introduced in the 2010/2011 school year will be a Teacher Advisor program. Teacher advisors will be responsible for monitoring the progress of a group of students in all areas of coursework. It is hoped that the teacher advisory will enhance relationships between students and teachers as well as between the home and school. A 45-minute period every two weeks will be made available to support the work of the teacher advisory throughout the year.

### **James Fowler High School**

Jurisdiction: Calgary School District

Location: Calgary

Grades: 10–12

Population: 1349

The 2009/2010 transitional year was used at James Fowler High School to explore a variety of instructional strategies that emerged from the added flexibility afforded in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project. The principal introduced the project to his full teaching staff and encouraged innovative action research projects to be designed and implemented over the year. A group of about 20 – 25 teachers representing various departments in the school agreed to engage in an action research project and engage in monthly meetings to share ideas, report on results and discuss the potential future direction of the project. In addition, a Teacher Advisory committee was formed in the fall of 2009 to “become part of the conversations that would gather the momentum and impact change in the school with regards to student achievement”. The Teacher Advisor committee initiated school-wide discussions and surveys and engaged in school visits and research to inform their work.

Action research projects over the year included:

- A self-directed unit in Mathematics 31 supported by innovative use of an on-line learning management system (Desire 2Learn);
- An integrated Social Studies and English unit of study focusing on a group of ESL learners and the experiences that they brought to Canada from their home countries;
- A cross-strand project-based approach to CTS managed within a team-teaching structure;
- Physical Education programming focused on the needs of an individual student who had not yet met success in attaining the mandatory credits for the program;
- Various explorations of the use of Desire 2Learn (D2L) and other technologies to support student learning.



Based on the results of these projects and the collaborative dialogue that took place over the year the school enters the pilot project phase of the project with a focus on the following areas:

- The establishment of a school-wide teacher advisory (TA) program. The TA program will create a new role for all teachers in the school who will be given a group of students who they will be responsible for monitoring and advocating for over their three years of high school.
- The development of an E-Learning Center that will provide an alternative approach to students who are not successful in the traditional classroom setting. The E-Learning Center will also be used to support all teachers in developing courses in D2L to enrich the learning for all students in their classes.
- Credit recovery options to extend time for students to learn in the optional areas and CTS to support the attainment of credits.
- Combined Core Course/Learning Strategies courses allowing students extended time and a focus on learning strategies to support success in core areas.
- Continued exploration of cross-curricular opportunities offered in a team-teaching environment by interested teachers.
- The addition of an Advanced Placement program at the school to provide expanded choices to students.
- The alignment of academic and non-academic courses in the timetable to allow for ease of migration of students who may be supported from switching streams.
- Institute after school learning opportunities three times per week where students will be able to access help from teachers.

### **M. E. LaZerte High School**

Jurisdiction: Edmonton School District

Location: Edmonton

Grades: 10–12

Population: 1997

Prior to the introduction of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project, the principal of M. E. LaZerte implemented a comprehensive school-wide assessment plan that continued into the 2009/2010 transitional year. The school-wide assessment plan focuses on a wide variety of assessment for learning strategies to support student learning. A “Missed Assignment Make-Up Room” was established after school two days a week to provide students an opportunity to make up missing assignments. Also a “Step-Up” program was created so students are able to access self-directed learning opportunities. This school-wide assessment plan has had a strong influence on the High School Flexibility Project at the school. Conversations about potential strategies for alternative program delivery and organization were filtered through the lens of the assessment plan.

Over the 2009/2010 transitional year three areas were targeted to explore alternative organization and delivery. First, an Academic Support Center was implemented to assist struggling students to seek one-on-one support during class time. Next, students enrolled in the Math 14/24 program were given an opportunity to complete modules for this program in an individualized setting. The teacher working with this group provided clear time guidelines to help students pace their way through the program.



Finally, a combined Social 20-2/30-2 class was established in Semester II of the 2009/2010 school year. Students' timetables were adjusted to allow for this class to be delivered for the entire morning on alternating days. The teacher designed a variety of instructional approaches including a combination of direct instruction, videoconferencing and field trips. The teacher established high expectations for all students matched with considerable supports to help students achieve success.

At the conclusion of the transitional year there were significant gains in course completions overall in the school as well as observed gains in the success rate in both the Math 14/24 and Social 20-2/30-2 program.

As the 2009/2010 transitional year progressed, the administrative team worked with department heads to brainstorm other areas that alternative delivery may be strategically implemented. As a result of this the 2010/2011 school year will begin with additional strategies including:

- The "Step-Up" program is partnering with Alberta Distance Learning to continue to offer students opportunities for self-directed learning.
- Combined CALM 20 and Physical Education classes where outcomes from both programs will be managed in one block of time.
- Combined 20/30 Academic Courses (English, Math, Biology, Chemistry and Physics) where students are registered in a 20/30 course sequence for the same discipline in two 80-minute periods blocked in their timetable one semester with the same teacher and curricular outcomes from the two courses are disaggregated and recombined to support student success at the 30 level.
- Intensive 30-level courses where students will have two 80-minute periods blocked in their timetable to manage either Math 30/31 or Physics 30/Chemistry 30 writing a diploma exam or final exam in November and one in January.
- Combined courses in Science 14/24 that is fast-tracked allowing students to complete both courses in half the time.

### **Olds High School**

Jurisdiction: Chinook's Edge School Division

Location: Olds

Grades: 9–12

Population: 433

The Olds High School Community has been involved in extensive collaborative planning over the last several years to prepare for the opening of a new school (the Community Learning Campus (CLC) that is built on the campus of Olds College. There has been a complete alignment of school district and school leadership in working with the broader community in Olds to create a new building and learning opportunity for high school students in Olds. The principal of the school has played a critical role over the last several years in bringing the community together and forging relationships with the college to present a new concept of high school to the students who moved into the new campus in December of the 2009/2010 school year. The High School Flexibility Project has provided the school community the flexibility it needed to take full advantage of the partnerships forged at the CLC.



The redesign of Olds High School is best described as a comprehensive, integrated set of strategies that is designed to evolve over the life of the project and beyond. Included in the redesign are elements of the following:

- Collaborative team planning and team teaching;
- Interdisciplinary project-based learning coupled with authentic assessment;
- Flexible use of time for both students and teachers;
- Dual credit opportunities through the partnership with the college;
- Flexible use of spaces both in the school building and designated areas of the college campus;
- A “school-within-a-school” structure breaking the community into smaller units with;
- A thematic approach to each year of high school to bring coherence to the student’s learning experience throughout their four years at the school;
- The development of personal learning plans for each individual student;
- A focus on student-centered decision-making.

The redesign of program delivery and organization drove the design of the new building. The building provides four distinct “pods” to house the four academies: one Grade 9 academy, two Grade 10–12 academies and one Grade 10–12 academy dedicate to self-paced, self directed learning. Each pod contains classroom spaces, large open areas for gathering and study, small meeting rooms and, a large flexible learning space. The timetable is designed to provide teacher teams with large “chunks” of time to manage the outcomes of the programs they are assigned to teach.

The Grade 9 academy is focused on students developing an understanding of their learning needs so that they can make an informed choice of either moving into the self-directed academy or the more “traditional” 10–12 academy for the remainder of their high school. A group of students is assigned a specific group of teachers who will work with the students over the final three years at the school. It is the responsibility of the group of teachers to guide the students in the development of their personal learning plan and manage the learning in all of the curricular areas assigned to the academy. Students engage in learning “outside” of their academy for a group of programs such as physical education, physics and CTS. Students involved in the self-directed academy will progress at their own pace under the guidance of teachers assigned to that academy using a combination of teacher-designed resources, small group seminars and, tutorials.

### **Peace Wapiti Academy**

Jurisdiction: Peace Wapiti School Division

Location: Grande Prairie

Grades: 9–12

Population: 493

The bulk of the time over the 2009/2010 transitional year was used to engage students, parents and teachers in a dialogue around school redesign to determine the direction that the project should take over the following three years. A combination of surveys, focus groups, forums, and, planning and information meetings took place over the year to gain the input of all stakeholders and to begin an ongoing conversation about school improvement. As the year progressed, input coalesced into two major themes: the school needed to create



structures to better support learning relationships and use of time needed to be conceived in a manner that meaningfully responded to the individual needs of students. These themes led to two key strategies for the school. The institution of a new role for teachers called “Academic and Individual Mentor (AIM)”. The AIM role defined a set of actions and responsibilities that each teacher in the school would adopt to act as a student advocate and a monitor of student learning progress. The second strategy was a decision to alter the bell schedule to include a flexible block of time (called iPlan) to “allow students choice in how to meet their educational needs”.

Over the transitional year a planning team was put into place whose job it was to work out the details of how the two key strategies would be implemented in the 2010/2011 school year. Part of this planning included the development of materials for teachers to use. As well the team experimented with alternative bell schedules in the second half of the transitional year to determine how best to incorporate iPlan time into the timetable. In addition to the two key strategies are a number of supportive strategies that will provide students with additional flexibility for their learning. Included in these are:

- The establishment of flexible testing dates for students accompanied by a central testing center for students to be assessed;
- The implementation of an integrated CALM course for Grade 10 students where CALM outcomes are addressed in a number of other course areas (Math, English, Social and PE);
- The opportunity for students to engage in self-directed CTS courses (outside of scheduled CTS courses);
- Access to on-line coursework as an alternative method of delivery within regularly scheduled class;
- The implementation of “Academic Recovery” time for students who did not complete course outcomes in the timeframe of scheduled courses;
- Use of MOODLE to support the fast-tracking of students in the Math 24 and Science 14/24 program.

### **Spruce Grove Composite High School**

Jurisdiction: Parkland School Division

Location: Spruce Grove

Grades: 10–12

Population: 1031

The principal has utilized a distributed leadership model for planning and decision-making throughout all phases of the project at the school. In the transitional year, a large planning committee of representatives from each curricular area along with the entire administrative team has worked with all stakeholder groups in their school community to guide the direction of the project. Input from parents, teacher and students has been sought and discussed by the planning committee which has the responsibility of transforming this input into a vision for the project. This overarching vision has been given back to each department within the school to develop strategies that will help move their specific department and the school forward in reaching the overarching vision for the school.

Highlights of the vision for the school over the life of the project are:

- Departments offer multiple tracks for learning to occur at any pace.
- The school provides a variety of common work areas for students.



- Multiple teachers teaching multiple units to a variety of students (teachers teaching ALL students).
- Students display competencies and attain mastery at a pace commensurate with their needs and abilities.
- Increase student one-on-one consultation.
- Students take ownership for their education through personalized learning opportunities for students to learn any time/any place/any pace.
- Professional Learning time built into teachers' timetable for collaboration.
- Independent study resource room housed with core teachers throughout the day for students to access help as needed.

Throughout the transitional year, Student-Teacher Advisory Teams (STAT) were established for Grade 10 students. The purpose of STAT was to provide Grade 10 students with a key adult in the school who would provide guidance and establish a critical learning relationship at the school. Over the transitional year a committee was struck to develop a STAT handbook for teacher use. A second major initiative was the establishment of "Flexible Wednesdays". On one Wednesday a month the school was organized to support students in a self-directed approach to their learning. Several formats were explored throughout the transitional year to provide numerous opportunities for students to choose from in order to enrich or remediate their learning at the school. Through the exploration of several approaches different tracking systems were experimented with to keep students accountable for the time that they had available to them on Flexible Wednesdays.

As the school is moving into the pilot project phase, STAT is being expanded to all grade levels and "Flexible Wednesdays" have evolved into daily opportunities for students to have access to "personalized learning time" when they have demonstrated a commitment to mastering course outcomes. Wednesday's timetable will be altered to allow for a large block of time for teachers to meet as groups and for students to have access to remediation and/or enrichment.

Individual departments are expected to continue to implement strategies that support the overall vision of the school. The planning committee will continue to assemble these strategies and share with the broader school community as well as continue to engage with all students, parents and teachers to contribute to the direction that the school takes over the life of the project.

### **St. Mary of the Lake/St. Francis of Assisi**

Jurisdiction: Living Waters Catholic Separate Regional Division

Location: Slave Lake

Grades: K-12

Population: 228 (Total); 69 (10-12)

There has been a focus on school improvement at St. Mary of the Lake School over the five years preceding the transitional year of the High School Flexibility Enhancement project. Using surveys and focus groups, the principal has engaged students, parents and teachers at the school to determine what works and what doesn't work for learning. The High School Flexibility Enhancement Project has given the school the opportunity to redesign their program delivery and school organization to meaningfully respond to this input.



The work over the transitional year at the school has been comprehensive and far-reaching. Included in the strategies over the 2009/2010 year are: integrating course outcomes, team teaching, flexible scheduling to meet student needs, and a variety of assessment strategies for students to demonstrate competencies. The overall goal of the improvement efforts is to “personalize the educational experiences of our high school students and create a transformational change in our school”.

The teaching staff has been reorganized into interdisciplinary teams which are responsible for managing, as a collaborative team, outcomes from connected programs of study (for example, Social Studies/Language Arts). Each team of teachers is given a large chunk of time in the daily schedule to meet with students as they interact with projects that address the connected disciplines. The amount of time that a particular project is given is left to the discretion of the interdisciplinary team. In addition, the interdisciplinary team is encouraged to seek out additional connections to other program areas (such as CTS) in developing their projects. Assessments are “blended” in a manner that a single assessment will be used to give evidence of learning in specific outcomes from several different areas. It has been discovered that this approach is ultimately a more efficient use of available learning time. The “time saved” in this approach is used to “get into high-order thinking activities, to deepen students’ knowledge, expand their skills, and to ensure learning activities are practical...and preparing students for life”.

Results from the first year of this redesign effort are promising with evidence of increased attendance by students as well as increased engagement in learning activities. Although the work has been, at times, frantic and there have been many stops and starts in this transitional year, there has been a palpable enthusiasm from students, parents and teachers alike. As two teachers reported:

- I believe in this project because it is what real learning and teaching is supposed to be about. This is forcing me to look at the curriculum in a new perspective and truly evaluate what is important for students to know.
- How often in a career comes a chance to really create something new and perhaps make something for others to follow? This project is an opportunity to create an educational system the way I think it should be – I would choose the hard work and stress over an easy assignment.

### **École Ste-Margerite-Bourgeois**

Jurisdiction: Greater Southern Separate Catholic Francophone Education Region

Location: Calgary

Grades: K–12

Population: 501(Total); 55 (Grades 10–12)

Over the transitional year the principal worked with a leadership team comprised of a vice-principal and several teachers to develop the project plan. The team focused its attention on two major areas over the transitional year: enhancing relationships between students, teachers and the home through the implementation of a teacher-advisory system for students from Grades 7–12 and, providing some time for students to direct their learning through the institution of flexible time in the timetable for students from Grades 9–12.

The teacher advisory was a focus of professional development and professional discussion among the secondary teachers of the school. During the transitional year a 15 minute teacher advisory (TA time) was



instituted to begin the day for all Grade 7–12 students. The purpose of this time was to give teachers an opportunity to build relationships with a group of students at a particular grade level. The teacher advisor (TA) was to monitor progress of students in their group, encourage students to use the resources available to them at the school to support their learning and to become the primary contact between the home and school for their group of students. The 15 minute TA time was kept free of any curriculum but was used, at times, to support the administrative requirements of the school (i.e., course registration, demographic checks, etc).

The planning team also explored the addition of “FlexBlocs” for Grades 9–12 students in the second semester of the transitional year. These were 60-minute blocks of time imbedded into the timetable three times over a 6-day cycle. FlexBlocs were incorporated strategically into the timetable as replacements to regularly scheduled class periods. During FlexBlocs a group of teachers was identified to be available to provide assistance to students. Students from Grades 9–12 were free to approach teachers as they required their assistance, work together in informal groups on their courses of study or work individually in an area of choice. There were areas throughout the school that were made available to students to support their work in FlexBlocs and students were made aware of which rooms that teachers were available to them for support.

The following excerpt from the school’s year-end report describes the rationale of these two strategies and how they work together to support student learning:

Students who leave high school need to be responsible and engaged learners, able to ask questions and seek answers, be creative thinkers and problem solvers. The FlexBlocs are designed to help students manage their time, work collaboratively with their peers, organize their time and work load. The increased TA time offers a structured, welcoming place to start the school day. Each TA also teaches the students in his/her group, develops a personal relationship with the students and is responsible for communicating information to parents.

Both TA and FlexBlocs have been carried forward into the project plan for the school. FlexBlocs have been extended to daily opportunities for Grades 9–12 students with a plan to introduce FlexBlocs to students in Grades 7 and 8.

### **William E. Hay Composite**

Jurisdiction: Clearview School Division

Location: Stettler

Grades: 9–12

Population: 439

Over the planning period for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project, the administrative team at William E. Hay Composite engaged in a thorough examination of their program from the perspective of each stakeholder group in their community. Through a combination of surveys, information sessions and focus groups with students, teachers and parents, a large amount of information was compiled and analyzed leading to the focus of the work at the school over the 2009/2010 transitional year. The school has also been undergoing a major modernization that created significant disruption to the daily operations of the school.



However, the focus of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project and the simultaneous modernization has provided both a figurative and practical experience with “redesigning” the school.

Following from the input received from the school community, the principal assembled a core planning team that has built a vision for the work of the school through the transitional year and beyond. There are two keys to the vision for the redesign at William E. Hay Composite. The first is a commitment to building strong relationships to support learning. The second is a realization that the industrial “lock-step” approach to program delivery does not provide the flexibility to both students and staff to meet the individual needs of students. In order to move towards this vision a large number of initiatives were implemented in the transitional year including:

- Redesigning an existing teacher advisory program to focus building relationships and not delivering curriculum;
- Piloting student led conferences;
- Instituting a “flex block” into the weekly timetable to allow students to direct their learning to meet their individual needs;
- Implementing “restorative courses” which provides additional time and support to students who may have not yet met the requirements of a course to receive credit;
- The design of self-directed learning modules into existing course structures to expose students to the opportunity to explore their learning in a more personalized fashion;
- The establishment of a collaborative “Student Resource Team” that works in harmony with the teacher advisory of students who are struggling;
- Implementing a variety of courses that are available to students outside of the traditional school day.

The initiatives introduced in the transitional year have been challenging to the school community but have been successful in moving towards the vision for redesign. As the transitional year ended the initiatives implemented are continuing forward – many are being expanded due to the creativity and commitment of the teaching staff as they embrace the vision of redesign.

The extent of change occurring at William E. Hay in the past year has been staggering, however, the change has encouraged teachers to continue to “think outside the box” and continually reflect on how to improve the educational experience for our students. It is difficult to focus exclusively on one aspect of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project at William E. Hay – the myriad of redesign efforts are so closely intertwined. We are confident that through the wealth of initiatives put into place in the implementation year all of the targets outlined in the Evaluation Plan for the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project will be addressed.



### Appendix E: Report of Baseline Measures

#### High School Flexibility Enhancement Project Summary of Baseline Measures For Participating Schools (September 2010)

| Measure   | 3 Year Average | Baseline      | Baseline Year |
|---|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| High School Completion (3 year)   | 69.3%          | 68.5%         | 08/09         |
| Drop Out Rate   | 4.5%           | 4.0%          | 08/09         |
| Diploma Exam Participation (4 + Exams)  | 49.9%          | 48.4%         | 08/09         |
| Diploma Exam Acceptable (50% +)   | 80.4%          | 80.4%         | 08/09         |
| Diploma Exam Excellence (80+)   | 15.3%          | 15.6%         | 08/09         |
| Student Migration (Difference (In – Out) )  | -14.1 students | -4.8 students | 08/09         |
| Student – Quality of Education  | 93.3%          | 93.4%         | 09/10         |
| Student – Quality of Teaching   | 88.7%          | 89.1%         | 09/10         |
| Parent – Quality of Education   | 88.2%          | 86.1%         | 09/10         |
| Parent – Quality of Teaching  | 82.8%          | 81.0%         | 09/10         |
| Parent – Improvement  | 21.5%          | 21.0%         | 09/10         |
| Parent – Stay the Same  | 50.5%          | 51.0%         | 09/10         |
| Teacher – Quality of Education  | 95.5%          | 96.6%         | 09/10         |
| Teacher – Quality of Teaching   | 96.3%          | 96.7%         | 09/10         |
| Teacher – Improvement   | 45.3%          | 51.8%         | 09/10         |
| Teacher – Stay the Same   | 32.7%          | 32.6%         | 09/10         |
| Course Completion (number of “courses” passed: courses may be 1 – 5 credits)                                      | 22.47 courses  | 22.55 courses | 09/10         |
| Student Engagement (Intellectual Engagement Composite Measure as reported in the <i>Tell Them From Me</i> Survey) | n/a            | 49.0%         | 09/10         |

#### Student Satisfaction Questions:

- Overall, is the education you are receiving at school (Very Good, Good, Poor, Very Poor, Don't Know)
- Is the quality of teaching at your school (Very Good, Good, Poor, Very Poor, Don't Know)

#### Parent/ Teacher Satisfaction Questions:

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you. (Very satisfied, Satisfied, Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied, Don't Know)

- With the quality of education your child is receiving at school?
- With the quality of teaching at your child's school?
- In your opinion, has the quality of education that your child experienced at school improved, stayed the same, or declined in the past three years? (Improved, Stayed the Same, Declined, Don't Know)



### Appendix F: Summary of Advisory Committee Meetings

| Date              | Committee                   | Key Agenda Items   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| October 5, 2009   | Internal Advisory Team      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary of transitional year proposals from schools</li> <li>• Review of input from schools on the draft evaluation plan</li> <li>• Status on year-end report</li> <li>• Report on visits with participating jurisdiction superintendents</li> </ul>  |
| October 9, 2009   | External Advisory Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed review of all transitional year proposals from schools</li> <li>• Update on Year-end report</li> </ul>   |
| December 1, 2009  | Internal Advisory Team      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review terms of reference for Internal Advisory Team</li> <li>• Introduce concept of measuring student engagement through the use of a survey tool as part of the evaluation plan</li> <li>• Brainstorm ideas for "accountability" if the 25 hour requirement was to be removed</li> </ul>  |
| January 13, 2010  | Internal Advisory Team      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Propose an amendment to the project charter to include a goal dealing with increasing student engagement and achievement (new Goal 2)</li> <li>• Propose the final evaluation plan for the project</li> <li>• Introduce three potential survey tools to measure student engagement</li> <li>• Introduce the final project plan template that participating schools will use to complete year-end plans</li> </ul> |
| February 19, 2010 | Internal Advisory Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide input on the three potential student engagement survey instruments – <i>Tell Them From Me</i> chosen as the best tool</li> <li>• Discuss a request from a school jurisdiction to join the project</li> </ul>  |
| February 24, 2010 | External Advisory Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report transitional year progress to date at participating schools</li> <li>• Propose and discuss amended charter</li> <li>• Propose and discuss final evaluation plan</li> <li>• Review <i>Tell Them From Me</i> student engagement survey tool</li> </ul>   |



| Date          | Committee                   | Key Agenda Items  |
|---------------|-----------------------------|---|
| May 10, 2010  | Internal Advisory Team      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on April 26, 2010 school leaders meeting</li> <li>• Discuss Conditional Grant with Regional Consortia to support collaboration among participating schools</li> <li>• Hear presentation by Stella Shrum, Director of Curriculum Standards and Process Redesign Committee</li> <li>• Present interim April Update report</li> <li>• Discuss a request from a jurisdiction to join the project</li> </ul> |
| June 18, 2010 | External Advisory Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary of Final Project Plans</li> <li>• Reporting of baseline measures collected to date</li> <li>• Discuss Conditional Grant with Regional Consortia to support collaboration among participating schools</li> <li>• Discuss links between HS Flexibility Project and Inspiring Education initiative</li> <li>• Discuss idea of presentations from schools at future meetings</li> </ul>                    |

## Appendix G: Summary of Final Project Plans

This chart provides a summary of the strategies and approaches that are significant features of each school's Final Project Plan which was submitted in the spring of 2010. This should be considered a snapshot of the vision and direction that pilot schools have developed over the beginning stages of their work. It is expected that the vision will continue to evolve at each school over time.

|                                   | Alternative Bell Schedule | Condensed Classes/Compacting Curriculum | Expanded Classes | Credit Recovery | Time for Teacher Collaboration | Flex Blocks | Project Based Learning | Use of Technology | Interdisciplinary Courses/Projects | Partnerships with Community | Classes "outside" of Timetable | Micro-Schedule by Teachers | Self-Directed Learning Modules | Flexible CTS | Team Teaching | Teacher Advisory | "Small School" Academies |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|---|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Archbishop O'Leary High School    |                           | X                                       |                  | X               |                                |             |                        | X                 |                                    | X                           |                                |                            | X                              |              | X             |                  |                          |
| Bellerose Composite               | X                         | X                                       | X                | X               |                                | X           |                        |                   |                                    |                             |                                | X                          |                                |              | X             |                  |                          |
| Bishop McNally High School        | X                         | X                                       |                  | X               | X                              |             |                        | X                 |                                    |                             |                                |                            |                                |              |               | X                |                          |
| Catholic Central High School      | X                         |   |                  |                 | X                              | X           |                        | X                 | X                                  |                             | X                              | X                          | X                              | X            | X             | X                |                          |
| Edwin Parr Composite              | X                         |   | X                |                 |                                | X           |                        |                   |                                    |                             |                                |                            |                                | X            |               |                  |                          |
| Grande Prairie Composite          | X                         | X                                       | X                |                 | X                              | X           |                        |                   |                                    |                             |                                |                            |                                | X            |               | X                |                          |
| Holy Trinity Academy              |                           | X                                       |                  |                 |                                |             |                        |                   |                                    |                             | X                              |                            |                                |              |               |                  |                          |
| J. C. Charyk Hanna School         | X                         |   |                  |                 |                                | X           | X                      |                   |                                    |                             | X                              | X                          | X                              |              |               | X                |                          |
| James Fowler High School          |                           |   |                  | X               |                                |             |                        | X                 | X                                  |                             |                                |                            |                                |              | X             | X                |                          |
| M. E. LaZerte High School         |                           | X                                       | X                |                 |                                |             |                        | X                 | X                                  |                             |                                |                            | X                              |              |               | X                |                          |
| Olds High School                  | X                         |   |                  |                 | X                              | X           | X                      | X                 | X                                  | X                           |                                | X                          | X                              |              | X             |                  | X                        |
| Peace Wapiti Academy              | X                         | X                                       |                  | X               |                                | X           | X                      | X                 | X                                  |                             |                                |                            |                                | X            | X             | X                |                          |
| Ecole Sainte-Marguerite-Bourgeoys | X                         |   |                  |                 |                                | X           |                        | X                 | X                                  |                             |                                |                            |                                |              |               | X                |                          |
| Spruce Grove Composite            | X                         | X                                       | X                | X               | X                              | X           | X                      | X                 | X                                  |                             | X                              |                            | X                              |              | X             | X                |                          |
| St. Mary of the Lake School       | X                         |   |                  |                 | X                              | X           | X                      | X                 | X                                  |                             |                                |                            |                                |              | X             |                  |                          |
| William E. Hay Composite          | X                         |   | X                | X               | X                              | X           |                        | X                 |                                    | X                           | X                              |                            | X                              |              |               | X                |                          |



